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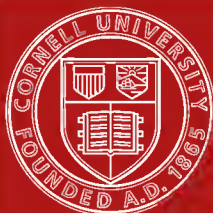
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HENRY DUNDAS

FIRST VISCOUNT MELVILLE

1742-1811







HENRY DUNDAS

FIRST VISCOUNT MELVILLE

*from the portrait by Raeburn in the  
National Gallery*

HENRY DUNDAS  
FIRST VISCOUNT MELVILLE  
1742-1811

*Political Manager of Scotland  
Statesman, Administrator of  
British India*

By HOLDEN FURBER  
M.A., PH.D.

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TO MY FATHER



## P R E F A C E

AS the friend and colleague of the younger Pitt, Henry Dundas has always commanded the attention of students of British history. He was no sooner dead than requests began to come to his son for permission to write of his achievements as political manager of Scotland, Cabinet minister, and administrator of British India. The prompt denial of such requests is in all probability explained by his son's disinclination to revive the unpleasant memories of the years 1805 and 1806 when his father was impeached for malversation of the funds which had been in his hands as Treasurer of the Navy. Even though he was acquitted, the affair cast a shadow over the last years of one who had been so active in public life, and his family persisted in their determination to allow no one to examine the papers he had left behind. Deprived of the opportunity of reading his biography, Dundas's friends had to content themselves with a monument to his fame in stone and mortar. A tall column surmounted by a huge statue was set up, after many financial difficulties, in St. Andrew Square, Edinburgh, in 1834, and is still one of the most prominent objects which meet the eye as one gazes from the Castle towards the north.

Except for their perusal by Lord Mahon, who ran through them early in the 1850's and who was chiefly concerned with the Pitt letters, Dundas's private papers lay undisturbed until they began to be broken up and sold at Sotheby's in 1924. In this way, a large portion of the Scottish correspondence, bought by the National Library of Scotland, and a still larger portion of India the correspondence, bought by Mr. Francis Edwards, who permitted it to be examined, have become available for study. Nothing, however, of any great moment relative to Dundas's impeachment has yet appeared in the sales and, as might have been expected, many other items of interest have already

been scattered among a large number of private dealers in England and America. For these reasons, the following pages do not pretend to present a complete biography of Dundas; they pretend rather to give certain phases of the extraordinarily varied career of this eighteenth-century Scotchman more adequate treatment than they have hitherto received. Thanks are due, not only to Director Dickson and Dr. H. W. Meikle of the National Library at Edinburgh and to Mr. Francis Edwards, but to Violet, Lady Melville, who gave access to letters and letter-books still in her possession. The officials of the Public Record Office, the India Office, and the British Museum have given their usual courteous attention to every request. For cordial co-operation and advice, I am indebted to Mr. J. A. Lovat-Fraser, now M.P. for the Lichfield Division of Staffordshire, who kindly supplied me with the references used in preparing his admirable character study of Dundas published in 1916, to the late Professor H. W. C. Davis, and especially to Professors W. C. Abbott, C. H. McIlwain, and C. K. Webster of Harvard University. Throughout the work I have had the benefit of the wise counsel of my father, who drew the political maps of Scotland for the Appendix with great care and skill.

HOLDEN FURBER

*Lowell House, Harvard University,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts.  
November 1930.*

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## INTRODUCTION

THE man whose life-story is told in the following pages needed no introduction to Englishmen and Scotchmen of the late eighteenth century. They all knew of Henry Dundas, the friend and right-hand man of the great Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger. Those who sympathized with the ideals of the French Revolution and desired political and social reform in Great Britain hated him as the arch-conservative of his time. Those who spent their lives in the service of the East India Company or in the administration of British India knew him, first as the leading member, and later as President, of the Government's Board of Control for India. Sailors had occasion to know of him as Treasurer of the Navy and First Lord of the Admiralty. Soldiers had heard of him as Secretary of State for War in the first years of the struggle against Napoleon. More especially, Scotchmen of both high and low degree knew him as the Scot whose word was law north of the Tweed and who boasted that he could return thirty-nine of Scotland's forty-five representatives in the House of Commons.

Among the men who helped to make Pitt's greatness possible, Dundas deserves the foremost place. Born in 1742 into one of Scotland's famous legal families, Dundas's future at the Scottish Bar was assured. He early developed extraordinary legal talent which was recognized by his fellow countryman, Lord Mansfield, perhaps the ablest British jurist of the century. Following in the footsteps of his family, Dundas became Solicitor-General for Scotland in 1766, was elected to Parliament for his native county of Edinburgh (Midlothian) in 1774, and in the following year became Lord Advocate, that is to say, principal law officer of the Crown in Scotland. It was his duty to represent the Crown's interests in cases coming before the supreme civil and criminal courts in Scotland, namely

the Court of Session and the High Court of Justiciary.<sup>1</sup> While Lord Advocate, Dundas built up a political influence in Scotland which made him of value to any Prime Minister. At the same time, he gained a reputation as an astute politician and a sound parliamentary debater. During the period of confusion in national politics which followed the fall of Lord North, Dundas, formerly an associate of North, waited upon events and turned them to his advantage with such skill that he emerged in 1784 as the friend and *confidant* of the new Prime Minister, the young William Pitt. Having been ousted from the Lord Advocateship during the Whig ascendancy of Fox in 1783, Dundas never returned to it, but devoted most of his attention to the reorganization of the government of British India under Pitt's India Act of 1784. In the 1790's, in addition to the supervision of Indian administration and the duties of parliamentary management, he was called upon to quell the widespread unrest in Great Britain caused by the French Revolution, and to manage the war with France which soon became the war with Napoleon.<sup>2</sup> On the King's refusal to grant Catholic emancipation to Ireland in 1801, he resigned with the rest of the Pitt Cabinet. Retirement from public life and from the India Board was not unwelcome. His physicians had told him a year earlier that his heart could not stand the strain of many more years of arduous work. On Pitt's return to power, in 1804, Dundas, who had been created Viscount Melville two years before by the Addington Government, accepted Cabinet office for a brief period as First Lord of the Admiralty. In 1805-6 he was impeached for misappropriation of funds committed to his care as Treasurer of the Navy. He had held that post from 1783 until 1801, but the bulk of the work had been done by subordinates. After a short impeachment trial, the last which has been held up to the present

<sup>1</sup> These courts were distinct in function, but not in personnel.

<sup>2</sup> Dundas was Home Secretary June 1791-July 1794. Colonies and War were then within the sphere of the Home Office. In July 1794 the Secretaryship of State for War was created. Dundas held it until 1801.



time, the House of Lords acquitted Dundas of the charges against him. Thereafter, although quite active in Scottish political affairs, he lived in retirement at Melville Castle in Midlothian until his death in May 1811.

Such, in brief, was the career of this versatile and indefatigable Scotchman who had a large share in shaping the history of Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. It was not his skill as a manager of Parliament or his ability as a Home, War, or India secretary which contributed the most towards making him indispensable to Pitt. The source of all his power and of his indispensability to this chief lay in his work as political manager of Scotland. A Prime Minister of that day could not do his work ably and efficiently if Scotland were disloyal to the Cabinet in London. The ability to call upon the majority of the votes of the Scottish representatives in Parliament meant much to Pitt, whose parliamentary majority was, on occasions, seriously threatened by the Whig Opposition. So clear had Dundas's ascendancy in Scotland become in 1785 that Boswell spoke of him as 'Harry the Ninth', uncrowned King of Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

To maintain and strengthen his hold over his native land was Dundas's constant aim throughout his active career. If we would fully understand his accomplishments in national politics and administration, we must not neglect his work as political manager of Scotland, which went on simultaneously, and, in large part, made those accomplishments possible. The minutiae of local politics are, however, hardly to be spoken of in the same breath with great affairs of state. The Cabinet minister when he turns away from Westminster to deal with the pressing demands of local politicians moves in a world which may well be described by itself. Therefore, while not forgetting that Dundas, as Lord Cockburn said, was the 'Pharos of Scotland' by whose light all steered to fame and wealth, we shall first devote our attention to an account of his achievements as a statesman and Indian administrator.

<sup>1</sup> Boswell, J., *Letter to the People of Scotland*, 1785.

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN REFERENCES

*Mel. MSS.* Melville Manuscripts.

*MSS. Fam. Alb.* Book of family records in possession of Violet, Lady Melville.

*I.O.* India Office.

*P.R.O.* Public Record Office.

*N.L.S.* National Library of Scotland (Advocates' Library).

*Hist. MSS. Comm.* Historical Manuscripts Commission.

*Eskbank 'Grange'.* 'The Grange,' Eskbank, Midlothian.

*Edwards.* Francis Edwards.

*'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.'* 'Catalogue of Lord Melville's East India correspondence' in my possession.

*D.* Henry Dundas.

*R.D.* Robert Dundas of Arniston, Dundas's nephew.

*R.S.D.* Robert Saunders Dundas, Dundas's only son.

*D. of G.* Duke of Gordon.

*D. of B.* Duke of Buccleuch.

PART I

DUNDAS AS STATESMAN AND  
ADMINISTRATOR OF BRITISH INDIA



# I

## BEGINNINGS OF DUNDAS'S CAREER IN NATIONAL POLITICS 1742-83

IN the house known as the 'Bishop's Land'<sup>1</sup> in the High Street of Edinburgh, Henry Dundas was born on April 28, 1742, to Robert Dundas, later (1748) Lord President of the Court of Session, and his second wife, Ann, daughter of Sir William Gordon of Invergordon. Robert Dundas, after a brief tenure of the Lord Presidency, died in 1754, when Henry was twelve years old, but his second wife, who lived to see her son reach the height of his career, died in 1798, at the age of ninety-two. Known throughout the period as Lady Arniston, she is always spoken of by her contemporaries as the most remarkable old lady in Scotland. They speak of her as retaining until the very end most unusual intellectual vigour. For forty years she knew everything that went on in Edinburgh. Her house in George Square was constantly visited by all persons of consequence in Scotland, and she corresponded<sup>2</sup> with her son in London upon all matters of national policy. From her Dundas inherited that extraordinary capacity for business which enabled him to accomplish so much in so many spheres of activity. Their relations were from the first extremely close and the few letters which have survived of those constantly exchanged between mother and son are of unusual interest.<sup>3</sup> No man ever started upon a career more exceptionally favoured by fortune and heredity than Henry Dundas. His mother supplied him with intellectual capacity and versatility; his father and grandfather, with wealth, position, and a practically sure road to success in the law. He

<sup>1</sup> Because it was the pre-Reformation 'ludging' of the Archbishops of St. Andrews.

<sup>2</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., p. 83, D. to his mother, Oct. 12, 1787: 'I am very busy but I always have time to read your letters, and, indeed, they serve as a foil to many troublesome ones I am obliged to read.'

<sup>3</sup> V. Family Album in possession of Lady Melville for further details with regard to Lady Arniston.

arrived at manhood just as the house of the Dundases of Arniston had consolidated its position as the foremost among that *Noblesse de robe* which dominated Scotland in the eighteenth century. His half-brother, Robert, more than thirty years his senior, became Lord President in 1760. Son of one Lord President and brother to another, his advancement at the Bar could not but be rapid.

Dundas was prepared for a legal career by the education usually given to the sons of influential Scottish non-noble houses. After an early training at Dalkeith Grammar School,<sup>1</sup> which was interrupted by an attack of smallpox in 1750, he went to the High School and later to the University of Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup> In his student days he 'professed an enthusiastic attachment to Whig principles'<sup>3</sup> and was elected a member of the *Belles Lettres* Debating Society. Such topics as 'Religious Liberty', 'Whether the profession of a Lawyer has done more good or hurt to society?' and 'Whether it is proper to mix love with tragedies?'<sup>4</sup> gave him his first opportunity to learn the art of public speaking. Although he was in demand almost at once among his mates as a jolly companion and witty speaker, he did not neglect his studies. In 1760 his mother wrote of him:

Henry minds his books very well and I have no complaint against him, but sympathize with him because, like myself, he is in a disagreeable dilemma. How to join the innocence of the Dove with the Wisdom of the Serpent, and yet give every friend his due.<sup>5</sup>

Legal study at Edinburgh University in the eighteenth century was very much a co-operative affair. Dundas, Sir Robert Sinclair, Archibald Cockburn, and George

<sup>1</sup> Wood, J. P., MSS. 'Life' bound, written and presented to Dundas's son, now at Eskbank 'Grange'.

<sup>2</sup> It is very regrettable that among the Melville family papers practically nothing has been found relating to Dundas's childhood and early youth.

<sup>3</sup> Somerville, Thos., *My own Life and Times*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> MSS. Minutes of the *Belles Lettres* Society in the National Library of Scotland (by the courtesy of Prof. H. W. Thompson).

<sup>5</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., p. 3.

Buchan-Hepburn formed a group of four who divided the work among them. Buchan-Hepburn wrote reminiscently in 1815 of their happy life together:

Lord Melville's [i.e. Dundas] first year was our second. After he joined us, he and S. living very near each other, it was agreed that we should study together three hours every evening and read one particular commentary and that Messrs. Sinclair and Cockburn who both were boarded with Mr. Hamilton then Professor of Divinity should study together and read another particular commentary, and we four met together every Friday eve and compared notes and questioned each other. The lectures and examinations of Professor Dick were in Latin and we of course spoke to each other in Latin when conversing on law. This practice our professor shortly after this period gave up because he found many of the students were little acquainted with the Latin language. . . . During the two years we four studied together we generally indulged ourselves once a month with half-a-crown's worth of Punch, that is an English pint of rum made into Punch, and when we could prevail on old John Medina, a painter and a man of wit, we contributed 2s. more to give him a bottle of claret. My pocket money was one shilling a week.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas became an Advocate in the spring of 1763, married Elizabeth Rannie, daughter of Sir David Rannie in 1765, and in the following year began public life as Solicitor-General for Scotland. There is no question that his rapid rise at the Scottish Bar was due in a very large part to his own extraordinary legal talent, although the traditions of his family undoubtedly shaped his actual course. In later years he was wont to say that his early success was gained through the patronage of the old Earl of Lauderdale, who had singled him out as the ablest of young Scottish advocates.<sup>2</sup> Others of his famous contemporaries were no less stinted in their praise. Lord Kames paid glowing tribute to Dundas in the introduction to his *Elucidation of the Common and Statute Law of Scotland*, published in

<sup>1</sup> Wood, J. P., MSS. 'Life', at Eskbank 'Grange', p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower, *Correspondence*, i. 480.

1777.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk ascribed Dundas's success to his ability to throw himself completely into the personality of his client.<sup>2</sup> Boswell, speaking of Dundas's defence of Joseph Knight, whose case was similar to that of Somersett, the negro freed by Lord Mansfield's famous decision that slavery could not exist in England, said:

I cannot too highly praise the speech which Mr. Henry Dundas generously contributed to the cause of the sooty stranger. Mr. Dundas's Scottish accent, which has been so often in vain obtruded as an objection to his powerful abilities in Parliament was no disadvantage to him in his own country. And I do declare that upon this memorable question he impressed me, and, I believe all his audience with such feelings as were produced by some of the most eminent orations of antiquity.<sup>3</sup>

Dundas won other legal triumphs as counsel for Archibald Douglas of Douglas in the great Douglas Cause, and as counsel for the prosecution of Mungo Campbell in 1770 for the murder of Alexander, tenth Earl of Eglintoun, on the sands near Saltcoats in Ayrshire.

During these early years of success at the Bar, Dundas continued to express his admiration for Whig principles, but his convictions were not those of a man who had firmly fixed his course and dedicated himself to the advancement of a cherished political ideal. By the rising young advocate, the Solicitor-Generalship was regarded as but a stepping-stone to higher things. Although, as we shall later have occasion to observe, he worked during the 1760's to extend the political influence of his family without deserting Whig principles, his eagerness for advancement caused him in 1771 to thrust himself upon the attention of Lord North as a possible candidate for Parliament.<sup>4</sup> This action is all the more extraordinary when we reflect that the seat which he proposed to contest was that of Sir

<sup>1</sup> Chambers, R., *Biog. Dict. of Eminent Scotsmen*, ii. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Boswell, J., *Life of Samuel Johnson* (3 vols., Macmillan, 1900), ii. 399.

<sup>4</sup> *V. infra*, p. 190, for a discussion of Dundas's first election petition.



Alexander Gilmour, the member for Midlothian, whom he had supported in the Whig interest in 1768. In this way, even though no election occurred, he became personally acquainted with Lord North, who, in the course of the ensuing three years, was so impressed with his abilities as a politician that he gave him Government support in his successful contest for Midlothian at the General Election of 1774 and rewarded him with the Lord Advocateship.

Of this new Lord Advocate who was henceforth to exercise his talents as the Government's political manager for Scotland during Lord North's ill-starred administration, the letters of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield give us by far the best picture. Of Dundas, the lawyer, Lord Mansfield held a high opinion, for he wrote in reply to Dundas's request concerning the tutelage of Lord Cathcart's son:

The cordiality with which you take him [the young lord] under your protection changes the whole idea. Being under your protection must be of infinite advantage to him. He will know in what course to read, what road to take, and your approbation will fire his ambition. The interest you take in him gives me a much higher opinion of him than I had, and, when it becomes more visible will undoubtedly give the whole country a favourable impression of him.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas, the politician, on the other hand, brought down upon himself the displeasure of the great judge, who regarded subservience to political expediency as highly reprehensible. To the young Lord Advocate's letter expressing pleasure at the willingness of one Robert Macqueen, later to become notorious as Lord Braxfield, to accept the first double gown available, Lord Mansfield replied post haste in an attempt to prevent Macqueen from being elevated to the High Court of Justiciary. He then said:

If you have wrote and mentioned to Lord Suffolk [the King's adviser in judicial appointments] the double gown with his [Macqueen's] privy, I am rather sorry for it. It has

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Ld. Mansfield to D., July 28, 1776.

an air of negotiating and soliciting which takes from the dignity of that noble plan which Lord Suffolk, with the King's approbation, has proposed to himself in the disposition of judicial offices, and which I wish the whole country to know and see.—In sound policy, I think where there are eminent men upon the Bench [referring to Lockhart, who, Mansfield felt, had the first claim to promotion] the justiciary should be filled from thence.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding this, Dundas, anxious that the 'éclat which Government had received in the business of Macqueen's appointment'<sup>2</sup> should be preserved, persisted in refusing to give the reversion of the next vacancy in the Court to Lockhart. In the course of time, this obstinacy brought forth a stinging rebuke from Lord Mansfield, who reiterated Lockhart's prior claim and referred to another scheme of Dundas's to have Lord Auchinleck resign in favour of Lord Stonefield, in the following scathing terms:

I have often declared against every bargain of that kind. Lord Suffolk has done himself great honour by the purity of his conduct touching the Scottish judges. I was in with the King last Friday and had occasionally some conversation upon the point. We strongly wish to distinguish the best men, as a meritorious act to the whole profession and the whole country.—If I hear of the resignation, I shall say what I always have said, that such a bargain is not to be suffered.<sup>3</sup>

On this, as on so many other occasions when the lawyer's ideal of justice and the politician's insistence on expediency have sharply clashed, the latter won. The appointment of the judge who was later to be known as the Scottish Jeffreys thus took place some time before it would have come about in the ordinary course of judicial promotion.

In spite of his willingness to serve political expediency and his growing attachment for Lord North, Dundas did not at once lose that leaning towards Whiggism which had characterized his earliest years at the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Ld. Mansfield to D. July, 28, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Ld. Mansfield, Dec. 1776 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Ld. Mansfield to D., Dec. 31, 1776.

University and the Bar. A few months after he became Lord Advocate, he actually supported a Bill against fictitious vote-making in the Scottish counties,<sup>1</sup> the very abuse by which he accomplished his political triumphs in later years. On that occasion he even indulged in platitudes with regard to the desirability of a better spirit of co-operation between the Scottish social classes. He was also alive to the rottenness of burgh government, so much so that an anonymous letter to the Lord Advocate appeared in an Edinburgh pamphlet in 1777.<sup>2</sup> It is very odd to find Dundas thus criticized for too much of the liberal democratic spirit:

You wanted to thrust the whole Deacons into the ordinary Council [of the burgh], nay, to rob the guildry of their privileges and bestow them on the Merchant Company. *May not this passion for Democracy spread into the counties.*<sup>3</sup>

Within a year Dundas gave notice of a Bill to relieve the Scottish Roman Catholics of their disabilities. The outburst of opposition with which this proposal was greeted in Scotland thoroughly damped any further enthusiasm on his part for fathering liberal measures. The riots which broke out in Edinburgh were soon followed by the Gordon riots in London (1780). All such proposals in favour of Catholics had to be dropped. Dundas, whose violent opposition to conciliation with America in 1778 indicated the increasingly conservative trend of his thought,<sup>4</sup> became an uncompromising advocate of the 'established order of things'. On one question only did his mind remain open after 1780. Ireland continually troubled him and he never felt that great changes in Irish administration were not imperative.<sup>5</sup> He always professed a sincere desire to solve the Irish problem by conciliation to the Catholics.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *A Letter to the Ld. Advocate by Eugene*, Nov. 18, 1777, quoted in Meikle, H. W., *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 27, n. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to his mother, Dec. 14, 1779: 'I am likewise following your advice in befriending the Irish, but even there, I wish you may not bring me into a scrape, for I suppose my countrymen will not approve.'

Apart from this, however, he is never found wholeheartedly supporting any measure (such as the reform of Parliament or the abolition of the slave-trade) which can by any stretch of the imagination be called liberal.

During his first years in Parliament Dundas maintained the reputation he had made in Scotland as an orator. Wilkes even went so far as to say of him:

Fox has the most logic, Burke the most fancy, Sheridan the most real wit. Pitt excels in command of words and ingenuity of argument, but Dundas with all the disadvantage of being a Scotchman is our greatest orator. There is [he added] much sound sense and no rubbish in his speeches.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously the first part of this statement can be dismissed as mere grandiose flattery. It is the last sentence which is most often repeated by Dundas's friends. 'I like your honest downright manner',<sup>2</sup> wrote Lady Spencer to Dundas, and she found many others to agree with her in such sentiments. It is this honesty and clearness in speech which caused Dundas's colleagues in Parliament to single him out as the ablest Scotchman among them. They liked his determination to remain a Scot instead of assuming English manners and English speech as Lord Mansfield had done. Dundas himself was not sure in the late 1770's that he was destined for a brilliant political future. Deserted by his wife, who eloped with a lover in 1778 after accusing her husband of neglecting her to attend to parliamentary business, he became pessimistic, moody, and impatient of political demands.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the call of the Scottish Bar, which he could never completely shake off until he became firmly attached to Pitt, was then especially strong upon him. One of his letters to his mother late in 1779 indicates this confusion of mind, but it also shows a determination

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair, Sir J., *Correspondence*, i. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Miscellaneous, Edwards.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to Sir J. Gordon, Nov. 24, 1778: 'I know not what time and business may do, but at present I feel nothing upon my mind but a settled gloom and melancholy.'

to persevere in a parliamentary career. He then wrote:

You advise me not to regard my fellow creatures abusing me, but to go higher. The first part of your advice I am very much disposed to follow, but you puzzle me as to the other part of it, for, in the House of Commons, I am daily abused for looking too much to the Higher Power, and yet you preach to me about looking higher, from all of which, I am led to believe that the best thing I can do is to go on in my present career without looking either high or low, to the right, or to the left.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1780, therefore, found Dundas with a reputation for solid oratory, a great capacity for parliamentary business, and an influence over the politics of Scotland which would make him valuable to any minister. Though an earnest supporter of Lord North, he was wedded to no political party and imbued with a determination to pursue the even tenor of his way and let his political future be guided by events. He needed no great sagacity to discern the weaknesses in Lord North's administration. The fortunes of Great Britain and her Empire were at their lowest ebb. At war with France, Spain, and the United States, and shortly to be at war with Holland, Lord North, confronted with steady opposition from the groups of Whigs led by Lords Rockingham and Shelburne, was vainly struggling against a sea of difficulties without any real hope of success. Meanwhile Dundas's talents were gaining more and more recognition in the House of Commons. Early in June, Sir William Gordon wrote to Dr. Alexander Carlyle, the famous Scottish divine:

My friend the Advocate has made a very brilliant figure; he is really a fine manly fellow, and I like a decided character. He speaks out and is afraid of nobody.<sup>2</sup>

Later in the month, Dundas did not hesitate to indicate displeasure and dissatisfaction with Lord North's atti-

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to his mother, Dec. 14, 1779.

<sup>2</sup> Meikle, H. W., *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 28, n. 2, quoted from Univ. of Edin. MSS., Carlyle letters, No. 104.

tude towards him. In letters to John Robinson, Lord North's confidential political agent, Dundas expresses himself as most incensed at Lord North's granting a survivancy of the directorship of the Scottish chancery to Sir James Erskine.<sup>1</sup> Dundas was more disturbed at his own failure to receive a *life* appointment as Keeper of the Scottish Signet. In spite of the Prime Minister's protestations that he was helpless because of the King's new ruling in regard to such minor offices, Dundas accused his chief of treachery. He then wrote to Robinson, 'Mine is the only Scotch office, or rather, I am the only Scotch person to whom this rule is to be applied'.<sup>2</sup> Although, as we shall see,<sup>3</sup> Dundas worked hard for Lord North in the General Election of 1780, he had not got over his pique at the opening of the new Parliament. On November 3, he wrote again to Robinson:

I cannot conceive how my absence could be any disappointment either to you or to Lord North. . . . If there is no system of Government formed, but the friends of Government collected merely to oppose one faction and support another, the object is indeed contemptible, and the prospect a most unpleasant one.<sup>4</sup>

Possibly a desire on the part of Lord North to make Dundas more contented, happy, and loyal may have brought about Dundas's appointment as head of the committee selected in the spring of 1781 to inquire into the cause of the war in the Carnatic (Madras) and into the conduct of Sir Thomas Rumbold and others of the East India Company's servants on the Madras establishment. However that may be, with his work on this committee began Dundas's long connexion with India and Indian affairs. It would be impossible, without losing the thread of the narrative, to treat adequately

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI (1887), p. 30, No. 264, D. to J. Robinson, June 23, 1780.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Infra*, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI (1887), p. 38, No. 321, D. to J. Robinson, Nov. 3, 1781.

of Dundas's connexion with every phase of Indian history during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. We shall have to be content to touch only upon those broader aspects of Indian policy which affected Great Britain and the Empire as a whole. Indeed the minutiae of India's domestic affairs during this period are singularly uninviting to the modern mind. We are confronted with a welter of intrigue, corruption, and financial confusion in which the desired kernel of truth is seldom found. The maze of East India servants, nabobs, sultans, rajahs, and Mahratta chieftains was likewise baffling to those who had actually to cope with their problems. There were few members of Parliament who really made a serious attempt to understand India thoroughly. On the one side, Burke and Sheridan stand out; on the other, Dundas. He positively enjoyed wading through the masses of Indian documents and he probably spent more of his time on Indian affairs than on anything else in his long public career. Not even Scotland or the management of the war against Napoleon occupied more of his working hours. Since no other of Lord North's immediate followers developed an equal interest in Indian affairs, Dundas found himself a recognized authority on that subject within a few months. No sooner had his committee begun its labours than letters began to come to Dundas recommending various solutions for the whole Indian problem.<sup>1</sup> As early as June 1781, rumours got abroad that Lord North was planning to create a new Secretaryship of State for India to be filled by Dundas. On June 16, 1781, Dundas wrote to his young son:

You hear very truly from everybody when you hear that I am very much hurried. Your news of my being Secretary

<sup>1</sup> See Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI, Nos. 363-4, 392-3; India Office MSS., Home Miscellaneous, 434. G. Smith to D., Apr. 23, 1781, recommends retention of native law, a British Supreme Court, retention of Company's chartered rights: MSS. Cat. of D.'s E. I. letters, in my possession, A. Ramsay to D., May 6, 1781. Also Hill, S. C., *India Office Records*, p. 89.

of State for India has not yet been communicated to me. Whatever temptations may come in my way, I don't think I shall be induced to quit the King's Advocateship. It is a situation so much of my own acquiring that I shall not easily quit my professional line of life.<sup>1</sup>

Lord North did in fact offer Dundas a seat at the Treasury Board with the obvious intention of using his knowledge of India. This offer was refused on the ground that it would neither augment Dundas's fortune nor gratify his ambition. He told Lord North, through John Robinson, that the public would feel that one of the offices would be treated as a sinecure. The letter concluded with assurances of his intention to give Lord North steady and cordial support so long as he (Dundas) remained in Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

In view of later events, Dundas's refusal of these offers from Lord North in the summer of 1781 seems extremely significant. Doubtless his predilection for the Scottish Bar played its part, but it is very probable, in view of the increasing instability of the political situation, that he realized the inadvisability of being too closely allied to a Prime Minister whose days were numbered. He had taken care not to ignore the first appearance in the House of Commons of the son of the great Lord Chatham. Although forced, as a follower of Lord North, to oppose William Pitt's ringing attacks on the American War in the spring of 1781, he nevertheless went out of his way to praise the new member's 'first rate abilities, high integrity, bold and honest independence of conduct, and most persuasive eloquence'.<sup>3</sup> His personal regard for Lord North was no doubt sincere, and he hoped to the last that the crisis might be met by strengthening Lord North's ministry with new blood, but he knew too much of politics to allow himself to be closely bound to the ministry when its

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., p. 12, D. to son Robt., June 16, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI, p. 42, Nos. 366 and 367, D. to J. Robinson, July 5 and 8, 1781.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Omond, G. W. T., *Lord Advocates of Scotland*, p. 100. For speech praising Pitt in June 1781 *v. Parl. Hist.*, xvii. 496.



hold on Parliament and public opinion remained pitifully weak. November 1781 found Dundas disgruntled, much as he had been the year before. On the 20th, he wrote to Sir John Sinclair:

It is only your partiality which over-values the importance of my presence in Parliament, for no person whatever has made any request of me to attend. Indeed, it would be most disagreeable and inconvenient for me to come before Christmas, but I am so little accustomed to put my own convenience in competition with the wishes or the interests of my friends that I volunteered in offering to come if there was any anxiety about it, but there is none, for I have never received an answer to my letter.<sup>1</sup>

On the following day he outlined his plans for proceeding against Sir Thomas Rumbold by a Bill of pains and penalties and expressed a willingness to come to Parliament if the other members of the India committee thought it necessary. His letter on the subject, twelve pages long and probably written to Fox, shows the thoroughness which he was already devoting to the problems of Indian finance.<sup>2</sup> Any feeling that Lord North did not appreciate his services must have been set at rest by the receipt of a letter which Lord North himself dispatched to Edinburgh on November 18. In conclusion, Lord North said:

Your presence will be of the first importance at the opening of Parlt. on many accounts. The result of our first day's debate will be of infinite consequence. On the second day, we must reappoint the Secret Committee [on India] and we hope to see you again at the head of it. At the meeting after Christmas we shall probably take some steps in India business, if any step appears necessary or expedient. In all these matters your presence is absolutely and indispensably requisite so that I depend upon seeing you at the furthest on the day before the meeting. If it were not really of the most material consequence to His Majesty's affairs that you should be present, I would not disturb your repose before the Holidays.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair, Sir J., *Correspondence*, i. 104-5, D. to Sir J. S., Nov. 20, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, D. to — (copy), dated Edinr., Nov. 21, 1781, endorsed 'Fox' in pencil on back.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., North Corr., N.L.S., Ld. North to D., Nov. 18, 1781, written

During the next four months Dundas strove sincerely to enable Lord North to remain in power. There is no real reason to doubt the genuineness of any of his statements except one in a letter to John Robinson where he says, 'I feel it is a point of private honour in my own breast, which I value more than any situation to *stop* my political career with the fall of the minister whose friend I have been'.<sup>1</sup> In such a remark he was certainly playing politics, for there is nothing to indicate that Dundas had any intention of *stopping* his political career no matter who was Prime Minister. Yet, in all his other actions, there is lack of any evidence that he was playing Lord North false, and secretly conniving at his chief's downfall. In January rumours were heard that Lord North, thinking that Dundas still felt slightly neglected,<sup>2</sup> was about to appoint him Treasurer of the Navy. In February Dundas wrote to his mother:

I write to you to applaud you for the coolness of your judgment which leads you to trust, without enquiring more, that I will do nothing unbecoming what a man of integrity and public feeling ought to do.<sup>3</sup>

On the 3rd of March, in the same letter in which Dundas rashly spoke of stopping his political career, he suggested to Robinson a re-arrangement of the Cabinet which would save Lord North.<sup>4</sup> It was entirely natural that provision for Pitt and his young friends should have been made in this 'most private' plan. Here is Dundas's proposal:

[Prime Minister and First Lord	Lord North
of the] Treasury	
[Lord] Chancellor	Lord Thurlow

from Bushy Park. In the postscript Lord North thanks D. for the trouble he has taken about his wine.

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI (1887), p. 50, No. 440, D. to J. Robinson, Mar. 3, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Carlisle MSS., 15th Rept., App. VI (1897), p. 561, J. Hare to Earl of Carlisle, Jan. 1, 1782; p. 574, the same to the same, Feb. 11, 1782.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to his mother, Feb. 4, 1782.

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI (1887), p. 50, No. 440, D. to J. Robinson, Mar. 3, 1782.

[Lord] President of the Council	Lord Gower
[Lord] Privy Seal	Lord Weymouth
Secretary-at-War	Mr. Jenkinson [later Lord Liverpool]
Secretary for Foreign Affairs	Lord Stormont [nephew of Lord Mansfield]
Secretary for Home Department	Mr. Ellis
Secretary for India and Plantations	Mr. Henry Dundas
[a new Cabinet post to be created]	
Admiralty	Lord Howe

Mr. Pitt, Treasurer of the Navy, with a seat at the Treasury, Admiralty, and Trade, to some of his young friends.

The general principles of the above administration must be, an end to the American War, the best peace to be got, universal economy, and a high-handed executive authority.

As an alternative, in case Lord North did have to leave office, Dundas suggested that the King appoint Lords Gower, Thurlow, Weymouth, and Howe, and Mr. Jenkinson to the principal offices, the remaining places to be reserved for members of *either* the Rockingham or the Shelburne Whigs. In such a Government, Dundas himself would not take Cabinet office. A week later he wrote to Robinson:

I will fight your battle while a rag of you remains, but it is a wild idea to suppose that with a majority of only ten votes the Government of this country in time of war can be carried on. A few changes two months ago would have left us all upon our legs. But Lord Sandwich was a favourite with too many of you and by that partiality we are reduced to what we now are. . . . You know I have long felt *seriously* hurt that I am the only person in Scotland whose office is not for life. . . . Without any other feeling but personal love to Lord North himself, I am determined to stand or fall with him.<sup>1</sup>

On March 20 Lord North's Government finally succumbed to the forces ranged against it. Dundas's sister, Christy, who happened to be at Bath during the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 445.

following days of political manœuvring, had an excellent opportunity to report what was going on. She wrote to her mother: 'You will expect to hear that the Advocate [Dundas] is Secretary of State, First Lord of the Treasury; or at the very least that he has got the signet for life; not a bit'.<sup>1</sup> She then outlined the whole story of dissension among the Whig factions of Rockingham, Richmond, Shelburne, and Bedford, and told an amusing anecdote of the imperturbable Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who was such an adept at surviving ministerial crises. It seems that Lord Rockingham sought out Lord Thurlow and delivered a long harangue on the conditions which Lord Thurlow must agree to in order to remain in office. Having listened patiently without saying a word until Rockingham had finished demanding almost everything, including the patronage of all minor offices except two, Lord Thurlow said shortly: 'I will rather be d——d', lifted his hat, and went off. Nevertheless, when Rockingham had finally accepted office, Lord Thurlow still remained upon the woolsack.<sup>2</sup> In summing up the situation Miss Dundas said of her brother:

By the acquiescence of all parties, the Advocate continues to take the lead in the India business. He says his political interest is totally annihilated at present. But he would wish it to continue very long so rather than the continuance of the war with violent dissensions at home. Therefore he wishes some permanency that, if possible, we may be brought out of our present situation; you [his mother] may be perfectly at your ease about him; he loses in no shape, and if he chuse it, I fancy from what I hear, he may be in when he pleases. You are not to say this to anybody breathing. He is in very good health and spirits and so far as regards himself, he has good reason.<sup>3</sup>

Dundas himself confirmed this by writing to his mother shortly afterwards:

Sir William Murray hints to me that you were uneasy under

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., Miss Christy Dundas to her mother, Mar. 25, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i.e. because the King insisted upon it. See Rose, *Pitt*, i. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, letter of Mar. 30, 1782.

all the rumours you hear about me. I write you these few lines in order to put your mind at perfect ease upon the subject. The more humbled I may be thought to be, so much the better, because it will give the hint to the rats to leave the supposed falling house and any real friends who stay in it may perhaps find that the power is not so completely gone from it as enemies may wish or lukewarm friends may suppose.<sup>1</sup>

Although Dundas did not hold cabinet office in the new ministry of Lord Rockingham, he was perfectly justified in comparing himself to a 'supposed falling house'. He remained Lord Advocate. His power in Scotland was steadily gaining. He was more than ever the recognized parliamentary leader in Indian affairs. In what all knew to be a period of political instability following on the fall of a minister who had held sway for many years, he was in a peculiarly advantageous position. Lord North could not say that Dundas had basely abandoned him. Lord Rockingham could not dispense with his Scottish and Indian abilities. Lord Shelburne could not feel unfriendly towards one whose desire to further the ambitions of the young son of Chatham had been so marked.<sup>2</sup> During the spring session of 1782 Dundas continued to indulge his habit of praising Pitt while opposing the measures which Pitt favoured. This was the year of one of those early attempts at moderate parliamentary reform which were unable to rouse a sufficient public opinion in their favour before the fear of revolutionary France made reform by constitutional methods appear to be impossible. Appreciating the possibilities of the existing Scottish political system more fully than he had in 1775, Dundas was in no mood to favour such measures. Nevertheless, in his speech opposing Pitt's reform motion in May 1782, he eulogized the principles

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to his mother, Apr. 13, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see Wraxall, ed. Wheatley, iii. 67-8: 'Dundas who had a long and keen political sight, having already determined on attaching his future political fortune to Pitt, probably thought a speculative tenet [Parl. Reform] to be undeserving of contention,' quoted in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 25.

of the young member's illustrious father.<sup>1</sup> He was frank enough, however, to admit that, if reform were needed, it was more needed in Scotland than in England.<sup>2</sup>

Most of Dundas's time at this session was occupied with India. He began to keep a file of the letters he received from the East. Those that survive for the year 1782 are not very numerous, but they indicate that his compatriots in India looked upon him as a champion of the Crown against the Company and viewed the prospect of his acceptance of a new post of Secretary of State for India with unmixed joy. The wife of Lt.-Col. Patrick Ross wrote from Madras:

The situation your lordship expected to be placed in, I hope is by now accomplished, as it seemed to be a general wish that such an appointment should fall into hands so able and particularly at a time when there was most occasion to call forth abilities that would do honor to such a post.<sup>3</sup>

Another Scot named Gregory wrote to Dundas of the necessity of a complete new Indian financial system to be based on the abolition of the 'investment', or sum withdrawn from the India revenue each year to buy goods in India for export to England.<sup>4</sup> In this way British Indians quickly looked to Dundas to lead them out of the financial and political wilderness. The reports of the Secret Committee on the War in the Carnatic were presented to the House by Dundas in April 1782. His speech was an indictment of plundering and oppression in the Madras government. Reso-

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Hist.* xxvi. 1215, quoted in Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 25. It should be noted that in 1783 Dundas voted in favour of Pitt's second motion on reform, but he did so with a desire to embarrass the Fox-North coalition; and said plainly that he so voted in the hope of 'putting an end to the question entirely'; *v.* Meikle, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 710, Edwards, Mrs. P. Ross to D., May 30, 1782.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Catalogue of Lord Melville's Indian Correspondence' in my possession. This contains précis of all letters sent to Dundas on important India business, except letters of governors and commanders-in-chief. R. Gregory to D., Jan. 10, 1782. For a discussion of the 'Investment', see Banerjee, P., *Indian Finance*, pp. 25 ff. He states that the 'investment' was suspended in 1780, but I have found nothing in the Melville MSS. or the India Office to indicate that this was a considered step, and not simply due to lack of funds in 1780.

lutions of severe censure were passed upon Sir Thomas Rumbold, the Governor, but the House never took effectual action in his case.<sup>1</sup> For this, Dundas has been severely criticized<sup>2</sup> largely without reason, for the daughter of Sir Thomas Rumbold, in a volume devoted to the vindication of her father, has shown that Dundas was subsequently obliged to give up the prosecution because the evidence was untrustworthy.<sup>3</sup> The significant thing about these parliamentary reports does not lie in the Rumbold case itself but in the fact that they brought about the passage of the first resolutions praying the East India Company to recall Warren Hastings.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1782 the death of Lord Rockingham unexpectedly brought about a political situation which was greatly to Dundas's advantage. Sir William Eden, the future Lord Auckland of diplomatic fame, was not a bad prophet when he wrote on July 24:

Lord North does not see much efficacy in the ostensible leader of the House of Commons (Lord Shelburne, as Prime Minister), but thinks Pitt and the Lord Advocate [Dundas] will be very powerful supporters. The Advocate was expected yesterday and will certainly join Lord Shelburne if they give him his Scotch office for life.<sup>5</sup>

Lord Shelburne not only gave Dundas his 'Scotch office' (the Keepership of the Signet) for life, but he also made him Treasurer of the Navy and admitted him to the Privy Council. Moreover, he placed the stamp of official approval on the position Dundas had been fast assuming in Scotland on his own initiative by formally giving Dundas 'the recommendation of all

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Rumbold, E., *Sir Thomas Rumbold, passim.*

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 9. In 1782 Hastings submitted a new plan for keeping up the 'investment' of which the Directors said 'By this extraordinary scheme the Company is totally overturned, and all its relations inverted. The servants have at one stroke taken the whole trade into their own hands—and the Company are become agents and factors to them to sell by commission their goods'. This criticism of Hastings is not often noted. V. Banerjea, *Indian Finance*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Auckland Correspondence*, i. 11, Eden to Loughborough, July 24, 1782.

offices which should fall vacant in Scotland'.<sup>1</sup> Since Pitt entered Shelburne's Cabinet as Chancellor of the Exchequer, it is easy to appreciate the satisfaction with which Dundas must have viewed the whole transaction. Far from being 'totally annihilated', his political power was greater than it had been under Lord North, and there was every indication that his connexion with Pitt would lead to still greater things. Although Lord Loughborough (Sir David Wedderburn) felt that Dundas's former close attachment to Lord North would make Dundas less valuable to Shelburne than he had been to Rockingham, he was already thinking of 'Pitt and Dundas' as having a common political future of their own, when he wrote: 'I have no conception that Mr. Pitt and he [Dundas] will use whatever abilities can bear up an inefficient ostensible minister in the House of Commons'.<sup>2</sup>

As a matter of fact, Lord Shelburne was having a great deal of difficulty in arranging a satisfactory peace after a most disastrous war, while the House of Commons remained divided into three factions, vague enough in outline, but in decided disagreement, and utterly unable to provide a clear-cut majority for the ministry. Moreover, the King's personal attitude made more difficulties for Lord Shelburne.<sup>3</sup> As the uneasy months of the autumn session passed, Dundas probably did not view the prospect of another political overturn with misgivings. What he had not counted upon was the coalition between two men, Fox and North, who had so often vilified each other in former parliaments. The historian Gibbon told a friend at Lausanne that when Dundas heard of Lord North's plan to turn Shelburne out by voting with the Foxites, he begged Lord North on his knees to give up the infamous pro-

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-12. Meikle, H. W., *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Auckland Corr.* i. 17, Loughborough to Eden, Aug. 2, 1782. 'Though you know I have a very high value of the Advocate, I am certain he cannot be so powerful a supporter to the present as he was of the last administration.'

<sup>3</sup> Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 110-23.



ject.<sup>1</sup> Lord North coolly repulsed him, and Shelburne was turned out of office in February 1783. At once it was bruited abroad that the King, greatly incensed at the Fox-North coalition, was trying to persuade Pitt to take the helm of state. Dundas, a few days after Shelburne's defeat in the House, referred to this plan as his own, but it is clear that the proposal was first made by Shelburne himself.<sup>2</sup> For some time Pitt was in the throes of indecision. His final determination to refuse because he was unwilling to depend upon the uncertain support of Lord North plunged Dundas into the deepest gloom. Dundas's excitement at this time is reflected by the notes which he rushed off in quick succession to his brother, the Lord President, in Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup> Dundas had spent hours with Pitt, and had even left Pitt on February 27 at eleven o'clock 'firmly resolved' to accept. Yet at two o'clock, Pitt, while dressing for court, wrote Dundas of his reconsideration and final refusal.<sup>4</sup> Dundas wrote at once to his brother:

How it will all end, God only knows. I don't think I shall give myself any more trouble in the matter.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, Dundas had another chance to try to persuade Pitt to take office late in March when the Fox and North factions were quarrelling over the distribution of the spoils. Once more he pleaded with Pitt for hours and sent off hopeful notes to Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup> He did succeed in getting Pitt to say that, if the deadlock continued, he (Pitt) would accept office to save the country from anarchy.<sup>7</sup> Nothing came of this because the Duke of Portland was soon able to tell the King that all was serene again between Fox and North.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 125, letter D. to Shelburne, Feb. 24, 1783, quoted in full. D. favours Pitt as 'perfectly new ground against whom no opposition can arise'.

<sup>3</sup> Stanhope, P. H. (Lord Mahon), *Life of Pitt*, i. 82 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Pitt to D., Feb. 27, 1783.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Robert Dundas, Lord President, Feb. 27, 1783.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 88-9, the same to the same, Mar. 21, 1783, Mar. 24, 1783, Mar. 25, 1783.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Robert Dundas, Lord President, Mar. 21, 1783.

Accordingly the notorious coalition Cabinet entered upon its uneasy ten months of office. Dundas, because of his former close connexion with North, was allowed to remain Lord Advocate until Fox, in August 1783, heard that people in Scotland were saying that the Government did not dare to remove any Scottish office-holder protected by Dundas.<sup>1</sup> The removal of Dundas and the appointment of Henry Erskine speedily followed. Dundas was completely out of office for the first time since 1766, but his political prospects were brighter than ever. The coalition had no elements of permanent strength and it was especially fitting, from Dundas's standpoint, that the India question should have caused its downfall in December 1783.

In the debates upon India it was almost universally admitted that the Crown should be given greater control over the activities of the East India Company both at home and in the East. The only question was: How much greater? With the acceptance of the *Diwan*, or right to collect revenues for the Mogul Emperor in certain provinces, the Company had entered upon activities which were exclusively political in 1765.<sup>2</sup> Eight years later, Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773 reorganized both the home and Indian administration of the Company, but it created that system of divided responsibility between Governor-General, Council, and judicial court which made Hastings's task so difficult. Moreover, the precise nature of the new Governor-General's control over the subordinate presidencies of Madras and Bombay continued vague.<sup>3</sup> The growing murmurs against corruption among East India servants, the extreme measures which Hastings felt obliged to carry out, and the disasters of the Carnatic War of 1780, after which Sir Eyre Coote in his old age miraculously saved the Madras Presidency

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 13. See also Lord John Russell's *Correspondence of C. J. Fox*, ii. 203; Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Omond, *Lord Advocates of Scotland*, ii. 114; *Arniston Memoirs*, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Banerjea, P., *Indian Finance*, chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> Muir, R., *Making of British India*, pp. 130-9, contains text of the Act, 23 George III, c. 63, excluding verbiage.

from destruction, all combined to bring about those investigations in which Dundas had taken so prominent a part. The two India Acts which were passed in 1782<sup>1</sup> as a result of these investigations ameliorated the situation very slightly. Only one real abuse was remedied. Henceforth the Governor-General himself was not to be within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing had been really done, and members of the House came up to the spring session of 1783 knowing that a comprehensive India Act must soon be framed. Burke had already developed that solicitude for the Indian populations which burst forth so oratorically later on. Incensed at the reversal by the Proprietors of the Company of the Directors' vote to recall Hastings, which had resulted from the work of these committees, Burke, like others, looked to Dundas. In the midst of the political crisis of March 1783 Burke wrote Dundas a long letter on the wrongs of the Rajah of Tanjore, prescribing the restoration of native government in all dependencies as the panacea for the Company's financial ills.<sup>3</sup> In April 1783 Dundas brought in a comprehensive India Bill. He proposed to place entire responsibility upon the Governor-General, giving him power to override his Council.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he saw clearly that what India really needed was not measures but men, and the man whom he proposed to send out was Lord Cornwallis, an able and tried soldier and administrator of national reputation in spite of his unfortunate American experiences. In proposing him, Dundas said:

Here there was no broken fortune to be mended! Here was no avarice to be gratified. Here was no beggarly mush-

<sup>1</sup> 21 George III, c. 65, and 21 George III, c. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Auber, P., *Rise and Progress of British Power in India*, i. 588.

<sup>3</sup> Melville MSS., Burke Corr., N.L.S., B. to D., Mar. 1, 1783 (original, but unsigned). Printed in full in App. 'Native government can alone combine the prosperity of the country with the regularity of payments and this is true of every mediate or immediate dependency in India.'

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

room kindred to be provided for ! No crew of hungry followers, gaping to be gorged !<sup>1</sup>

But Fox had no intention of sharing the glory of solving the India problem with Dundas, and the Bill was conveniently shelved until the autumn session.

At that session Fox introduced not, as is so often stated, his India Bill, but two separate India Bills: one dealing with the reorganization of the higher branches of the Company's service, both political and commercial, and the other with the abuses of the Company's administration in India.<sup>2</sup> It was around the first Bill, which would have effected the extinction of the East India Company in all but name, both as a political power and as a trading corporation, that political controversy raged. In brief the Bill would have given the whole patronage of India and the entire control of the government to a board of seven persons, appointed by Parliament and irremovable for four years; after which they were to be appointed by the Crown. The mercantile interests of the Company were to be managed by a subordinate board of eight chosen by Parliament from among the larger proprietors. At once the wrath of Pitt and Dundas broke out against this scheme. Pitt said: 'It is, I really think, the boldest and most unconstitutional measure ever attempted, transferring at one stroke, in spite of all charters and compacts, the immense patronage and influence of the East to Charles Fox, in or out of office.'<sup>3</sup> Fox's announcement that a majority of the new board of seven were to be Foxites really brought about his immediate downfall. In spite of Pitt's opposition, the Bill passed the Commons, but the King, fully roused at what he considered a gross

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Mill, *History of British India*, 4th ed., iv. 537.

<sup>2</sup> Forrest, G. W., *Selections from the State Papers of the Governors-General of India*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 14. The second bill, probably framed by Burke, was introduced Nov. 26, entitled 'A Bill for the Better Government of the Territorial Possessions and Dependencies in India'. It merely catalogued former abuses and prohibited them.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 ff. See also Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 144 ff.; Jesse, *Memoirs of George III*, ii. 440-2; Kenyon, Lloyd, *A Sketch of the Life of Lord Kenyon*, p. 130.

usurpation of power by the ministry in office, authorized Earl Temple to say privately to any member of the House of Lords that the King would not regard as his friend any one who voted for the Bill. In consequence, the Bill was defeated; the King peremptorily ordered Fox and North to surrender the seals; and Pitt kissed his sovereign's hands on the next day as First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>1</sup>

Thus unexpectedly was Dundas's most cherished wish realized on December 19, 1783. Pitt was Prime Minister at last; yet the battle was still far from won. Fox and North regarded the hastily-formed Pitt administration as incapable of securing sufficient majorities either to carry on the government or to force a dissolution with any hope of success at a general election. Dundas, restored to his old post as Treasurer of the Navy, was one of the chief leaders in the fight. He had recommended his friend Ilay Campbell for the Lord Advocateship, knowing full well that all his own time would be needed for the political struggle and for the framing of new India legislation. The issue was by no means foregone. A dissolution would have been the logical step, but Fox's factious tactics prevented it. In blocking a dissolution, the Whigs really assisted their own downfall, since the majorities by which Pitt's proposals were beaten grew smaller and smaller, thus intensifying the Prime Minister's determination not to be bullied into resigning. The only course open to him was to fight tooth and nail in the existing parliament against Fox and North.<sup>2</sup>

In the first few months of 1784 the friendship of Pitt and Dundas was firmly cemented. In the social world outside, even more than in debate in the House, Dundas was of invaluable assistance. His knowledge of human nature, his jovial manner, his tact in handling people, conciliated those who were repelled by Pitt's austerity. It should not be forgotten that in 1784 Pitt

<sup>1</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, i. 144-51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. vii.

was very young, politically inexperienced, ignorant of mankind, and cold towards all who were not his intimate friends. His first move in January was to bring forward his own India Bill which had resulted from negotiations which he himself had conducted with the East India Company. In principle it followed the lines laid down in Dundas's proposals of April 1783, but, as it did not pass, we may well defer further discussion of Pitt's methods of attacking the question.<sup>1</sup> To have brought forward an India Bill at all when there was little prospect of its passage may have been a tactical error, but Pitt was cheered by the other side's low margin of victory: only eight votes.<sup>2</sup> In February Dundas was sure that Pitt and he would ultimately succeed. On the 16th he wrote to his mother that he saw no need of resigning and said:

It is impossible to enter into a detail of all the varying intricacies which the present state of politics beget from day to day, but I feel no doubt in my own mind that they will end as Mr. Pitt and I wish. There may be rubs and struggles, but so much the better if victory comes at last.<sup>3</sup>

In March the tide of public opinion rose higher and higher. By the cry 'Our charter is menaced, look to your own!' the East India Company had roused the Corporation of London and other civic bodies to address congratulatory messages to the King on the dismissal of Fox and North. The Duchess of Gordon wrote:

We are going up to town to support Dundas with all our power. You will hear of the wonders he has done in Eloquence and Politicks, and I know it will delight you that in all hostility of eloquence on each side of the house, he has shown the utmost respect in his power for Lord North and their former friendship.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, ch. vii.

<sup>2</sup> The Bill was lost on Jan. 23, 222 to 214. Rose, *op. cit.*, i. 163.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to his mother, Feb. 16, 1784.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, quoted in Sir John MacPherson's letter to D. dated Calcutta, Dec. 10, 1784.

Commenting on her description of Dundas's conduct, Sir John MacPherson wrote from India to Dundas:

I most certainly must admire the Telamonian shield you held round Pitt and the wonderful ever Ulyssean ingenuity with which you cut and traversed the line of Fox's *flumen ingenii*. Pitt resisted with a kind of etherial perseverance.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial debate in Parliament occurred on the King's refusal to dismiss Pitt at the request of the Foxites on March 8, 1784. Pitt said little, leaving the burden of the defence to Dundas. 'Seldom', said Wraxall, 'have I heard Dundas, during the course of his long and brilliant career, display more ability and eloquence than on that evening.'<sup>2</sup> Fox won his motion by only one vote. The dissolution and the famous General Election of 1784, which rolled up such a large majority for Pitt, followed. In this victory, Dundas's achievement as political manager of Scotland, of which we shall later treat in detail, played no small part.<sup>3</sup> When the returns were in, Dundas had finally won what had seemed to him since 1781 the most desirable object of his ambition. Pitt was Prime Minister; he was Pitt's right-hand man; he held a preponderant 'interest' in Scotland; and the management of India would soon be his for the asking. We cannot acquit him of political inconsistency, but his course was certainly far less tortuous than that of Lord North. Neither can we acquit him of paying most of his attention to his own political ambitions, but at least he was far from being mercenary or selfish. He has never been accused of favouring Pitt merely for the purpose of ultimately thrusting Pitt aside in order that he might rise higher himself. His devotion to Pitt was born of real respect. In spite of the great difference in their ages, Dundas always addressed Pitt as 'My dear Sir', while Pitt wrote 'Dear Dundas'. It was certainly in the best interests of Great Britain that the political

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Wraxall, *Memoirs of my own Time*, iii. 315-16.

<sup>3</sup> *Infra*, p. 204, and see map in Appendix.

anarchy, so well typified by the Fox-North coalition, should cease. As for India, which side had the better case? There may well be honest differences of opinion as to the comparative merits of Fox's and of Pitt's India Bills. Fox's measure, apart from the manner in which its omnipotent seven commissioners were chosen, had much to commend it; but we can hardly think that so violent a break with the past as the almost total extinction of the East India Company would have been for the best interests of India. As far as patronage is concerned, both sides are tarred with the same brush. To accuse Dundas of wishing to engross the whole patronage of India without saying that the Foxites were equally desirous of possessing it is to tell only half the story. At the opening of the new Parliament in May 1784, Dundas, no longer a Scottish lawyer with an uncertain political future, stood on the threshold of a far wider career, in which India was to play the larger part until the French Revolution brought him the twofold task of quelling disaffection at home and managing a great war abroad.



## II

### DUNDAS AND PITT: THE REORGANIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH INDIA 1784-90

AFTER rehabilitating the national finances, Pitt turned to India, and reintroduced in July 1784 the Bill which later became famous as Pitt's India Act. Although it would be wrong to speak of Dundas as the author of this Act, there can be no doubt that it was in a large part Dundas's work and was based on ideas which, as we have seen, had been developing in Dundas's mind ever since his chairmanship of the Secret India Committee of 1781. His Indian correspondents of both high and low degree still expected in 1783-4 that Dundas would become Secretary of State for India.<sup>1</sup> They were not disappointed, for the new India Act created that post for Dundas in all but name. The new law preserved the golden mean in leaving commercial patronage and commercial administration to the Company's Court of Directors.<sup>2</sup> All political power and the power to recall any British official from India rested with a Board of Control of six Privy Councillors appointed by the Crown. Two of these six were always to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Secretary of State. To this Board all political dispatches both to and from India were to be submitted by the Court of Directors. In case of disobedience, the directors or other servants of the Company were to be tried before a joint commission of both Houses of Parliament. Final judicial appeal by the Company against the Board's decisions lay

<sup>1</sup> The similarity on this point of the letters to Dundas of Sir John MacPherson, Councillor of Bengal, later Governor-General (Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, Dec. 10, 1784), of Lt.-Col. William Fullarton (Mel. MSS., E. I. Catalogue, Jan. 1783), and of George Smith, revenue clerk (I.O., Home Misc. 434, Feb. 1783), is very clearly marked. See also Omond, *Arniston Memoirs*, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> The Court of Proprietors was shorn of nearly all its power by the Act, 24 Geo. III, c. 25.

with the King in Council, or, in other words, with a body of which the Board itself formed a part. In urgent cases the Board might transmit orders to India without submitting them to the Directors. In India, the Supreme Government was still further protected from interference by the judicial department. The control of the Governor-General over the external policy of the subordinate governors was more clearly defined. The Governor-General or the Governor of Madras or of Bombay could always carry out his policies provided only *one* member of his Council voted with him. Avoidance of war and of alliances that might lead to war were enjoined upon the Supreme Government at Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> These, in brief, were the chief provisions of the Act, under which, except for some slight changes, India was governed until 1858. Ultimate responsibility for the Government of India obviously rested with the Board of Control. Of that Board, Henry Dundas was the leading member for eighteen years—1784–1801.

Under the law, three of the Board were a quorum; the senior member, in other words, Dundas, was to take the chair in the absence of the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We know that he so occupied the chair at thirty-three of the thirty-five meetings in the first six months of 1785.<sup>2</sup> In 1793 the special office of President of the Board with a salary was created for him.<sup>3</sup> During all these years, whether officially President or not, he presided over what was really an office of state equipped with its own corps of secretaries and clerks.<sup>4</sup> For all practical purposes until 1801, the Board of Control for India meant Dundas, or at most, Dundas and Pitt.<sup>5</sup>

It was said at the time and has been said since that

<sup>1</sup> 24 Geo. III, c. 25, as printed in Muir, R., *Making of British India*, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, Sir Wm., *John Company*, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> Muir, R., *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Foster, Sir Wm., *op. cit.*, chapter on India Board.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, J. H., *op. cit.*, p. 220, mentions Dundas's letter to Cornwallis, July 29, 1787, with regard to Pitt's regular attendance at the Board.

Pitt's India Act was deliberately devised to give Dundas control of all India patronage. Such critics have pointed out that the process which Lord Rosebery spoke of as 'the Scotticization of India'<sup>1</sup> would have been impossible under Fox's proposed India Bill.<sup>2</sup> This is in a measure true, but in this connexion it is well to remember that, in comparison with Fox's plan, Pitt's Act conferred far less patronage on the government board which it created. The two government boards contemplated by Fox were to have entire control of patronage, commercial as well as political. Under Pitt's Act, regulation of commerce rested with the Company, and the Board's control over patronage, political and commercial, was restricted to its power to recall any official. As to appointment, the seventeenth clause laid it down that 'Nothing in this Act shall extend to give unto the Board the power of nominating or appointing any of the servants of the Company.'<sup>3</sup> No doubt, in practice, the Board, or rather Dundas, did exercise much power over Indian appointments of all sorts, but that power was far less than that which would have accrued to the leading members of Fox's proposed boards.<sup>4</sup> Dundas himself, before the Board was set up, quickly disabused the Duchess of Buccleuch of the impression that he was to be an omnipotent czar of Indian patronage. The Duchess, having been importuned by Lady Glencairn to get her requests in ahead of the crowd, sent in her recommendations of appointment in June 1784, weeks before the India Act was passed. In reply Dundas wrote:

You, I know, will readily give me credit for my wishes to [obey your commands] on every occasion, but as the influence you are naturally supposed to have over me will of course

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 20; Rosebery, *Pitt*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Craik, Sir Henry, *Century of Scottish History*, ii. 244. For contemporary opposition, see Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> In this connexion see Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, John MacPherson to James MacPherson, Feb. 1, 1785. 'The leaving of the patronage in the hands of the Company was a noble sacrifice and worthy of the disinterestedness of a great mind [Pitt's?].'

bring upon you many applications, I think it right to apprise you what will probably be my situation with regard to India, if the measures of the present Government take place. My situation will be merely a situation of Controul, in which one of the most essential parts of my duty must be to check the Government of India in the exercise of its unmeasured and unprincipled patronage. Every Department of the Administration of India both at home and abroad is at present overstocked with unnecessary servants who, of course, having no lawful occupation, must subsist upon the plunder of the Company and the peculation of the natives of India. I am more enthusiast than most people in the belief that this may be effectuated; without vigor and resolution it need not be attempted, and it will require little explanation to prove to you that in order to justify the application of these qualities to the action of others, my own conduct must be guarded indeed. I will not have the least merit in being so for I will not dare to be otherwise. Those few hints will readily suggest to you their own conclusion which in truth is, that when all mankind will be led to suppose that I am omnipotent in the disposal of the Patronage of India, I will in reality have less in my power in that line than I have had for many years past.<sup>1</sup>

As for the 'Scotticization of India', there is no doubt that, though exaggerated in the minds of Dundas's contemporaries,<sup>2</sup> it was a source of irritation to his English colleagues. Lord Sydney remarked that 'three were as many Irish or English names'<sup>3</sup> as appeared on one of Dundas's lists of Indian recommendations. The latter part of the year 1784 was filled with such complaints. In August Daniel Pulteney warned the Duke of Rutland that 'jealousy may break out if Dundas is not a little checked relative to the Scotch, for whom everything is claimed, and granted without debate'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, D. to the Duchess of Buccleuch, June 20, 1784 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> No one can read Dundas's letter-books for 1797-1801 in the National Library of Scotland and not feel that his influence in India appointments of minor officials was circumscribed at every point by the rigid machinery of the Court of Directors.

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to His Factor*, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 14th Rept. i. (1894), Rutland MSS. iii. 131. Pulteney also had in mind Dundas's Bill, restoring the landed estates forfeited in 1745, which passed in this month and aroused great enthusiasm in Scotland.

In November Thomas Orde wrote of 'hints of jealousy respecting Dundas, who is said to take possession of the minister [Pitt] and conduct him as he pleases'.<sup>1</sup> The number of Scotchmen sent to India excited comment throughout Dundas's life and even afterwards, for Dundas's son inherited a seat at the Board of Control. In 1787 one of Gillray's cartoons appeared, entitled 'The Board of Control or the Blessings of a Scotch Dictator'. It depicted Dundas presiding over the Board while Pitt and Lord Sydney played push-pin. Dundas was reading a petition from the Bakers' Company asking his 'mightiness' to appoint some Englishmen. Four ragged Scotchmen in short kilts were waiting beside the table on which was unrolled a 'list of fit persons to succeed in the Direction' including such names as Fraser, Stuart, McLeod, McPherson, McLean, and McDonald.<sup>2</sup> It must not be thought that Dundas was blind to this sort of thing. He fully realized that there was a point beyond which he should not go in favouring his own countrymen. In the same month, March 1787, that Gillray's cartoon appeared, Dundas wrote to Sir Archibald Campbell, the new Governor of Madras:

I need not tell you that the powers with which you are invested and the feelings of disappointed men will create in them those little jealousies and malevolencies which are the concomitants of little minds. I am a little involved in the kind of attacks that are whispered about. It is said with a Scotchman at the head of the Board of Controul and a Scotchman at the Government of Madras, all India will soon be in their hands, and that the County of Argyle will be depopulated by the emigration of Campbells to be provided for by you at Madras. These kind of whispers are neither to be noticed nor regarded when they come in competition with any matter of the smallest importance. At the same time, when I recollect that Mr. Wilkes by such nonsense almost

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Rutland MSS., iii. 152-3.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 20. In 1821, Sir Walter Scott referred to the Board as 'the corn chest for Scotland, where we poor gentry must send our youngest sons, as we send our black cattle to the South'. Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, ch. lii.

created an insurrection in this country, I do not think that even non-sense is at all times to be disregarded. I feel this so much that I refused this year to support on my interest a very good man who has proposed himself to me as a candidate for the Direction. I told him fairly that as Capt. Elphinstone, the last chosen was my countryman, I would not even furnish the handle, tho' founded in nonsense, of raising the Clamour or Combination on such a circumstance amongst the Proprietors of India Stock. In short, we must appear to despise it, but in truth not do it to the utmost we would wish, for the Public Welfare is deeply concerned in the success and even popularity of our government. We must do nothing to injure it.<sup>1</sup>

Of the Scotchmen whom Dundas sent to India, more will be said later. In any case, whether it was a Scotchman, Englishman, or Irishman whom he was recommending, Dundas did not often forget that the 'real security of India', to use the words of Sir John MacPherson, member of the Bengal Council, 'depends upon Britain's choice of men who are to rule these possessions and not in a thirtieth degree upon the wisdom of those regulations which King, Parliament, and Company may lay down'.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1784 the Board of Control held its first meeting, and the administration of India under the new régime began. To the great Governor-General, this seemed the beginning of the end. As soon as the news of the Bill's passage and the appointment of the Board arrived, Warren Hastings definitely made up his mind to come home, not because he would have preferred Fox's Bill, but because the new Bill did not give the Governor-General an entirely free hand.<sup>3</sup> Also he could not forget that it was framed by and in

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., preserved at Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Sir Archibald Campbell, Mar. 23, 1787 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, John to James MacPherson, Calcutta, Nov. 1, 1783. Sir John MacPherson became interim Governor-General between the departure of Hastings in Feb. 1785 and the arrival of Cornwallis in Sept. 1786.

<sup>3</sup> Forrest, G. W., *Administration of Warren Hastings*, p. 308. Hastings wrote Dec. 27, 1784, 'I have seen, read, and abstracted Mr. Pitt's Bill. It has determined me. I will depart as soon as the *Barrington* is ready.'

the interest of men, like Dundas, who had passed a vote of censure upon him in 1782. When he read Pitt's speeches of July 1784, with their violent criticism of the foreign policy which he had advocated, he regarded them as a thinly veiled attack upon himself.<sup>1</sup> If he remembered that Dundas's proposed India Bill of April 1783 had given the Governor-General a free hand, he probably also remembered that Dundas had then planned to have him replaced by Lord Cornwallis.<sup>2</sup> Taken all in all, it was not strange that the first result of Pitt's India Act was Hastings's resignation and return to England.

Dundas's part in the famous drama of Warren Hastings's impeachment must still remain obscure. In later years, Hastings himself and the two memoir writers, Wraxall and Bland Burges, put it about that Dundas's jealousy of Hastings as a possible rival for the control of the home administration of India was responsible for Pitt's important decision of June 13, 1786, to vote with Fox and Burke in censuring Hastings for levying the enormous fine of £500,000 on Cheyt Singh, Zamindar of Benares. This vote made impeachment almost inevitable, and the story is that Dundas's jealousy had been fanned to fever heat by a conviction that the King had determined to dismiss him from the Board of Control and appoint Hastings in his stead.<sup>3</sup> Other writers have examined these rumours quite thoroughly so far as Pitt and the King are concerned.<sup>4</sup> There is nothing to show that the King ever thought of dismissing Dundas. The King, in his letter of June 14, 1786, to Pitt, revealed regret at Pitt's adverse vote concerning Hastings, but recognized the conscientiousness of Pitt's conduct. Nothing was said which would indicate any thought of breaking up the Cabinet.<sup>5</sup> As for Pitt, the evidence of Wilberforce is conclusive that Pitt examined Hastings's case with the impartiality of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Wraxall, ii. 35; Bland Burges, *Correspondence*, ed. Hutton, 81-90; Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, ch. iv.

<sup>4</sup> See especially, Rose, *Pitt*, i. 232-40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

a juryman and only determined upon an adverse vote with the greatest reluctance after most careful and profound consideration.<sup>1</sup> If, then, Dundas was jealous, his jealousy was not the decisive factor in swaying Pitt which the gossips would have us believe.

Even if Dundas can be acquitted of precipitating the impeachment on the above evidence, we are nevertheless still confronted with the problem of determining exactly what were his feelings towards Hastings. Probably there can never be a precise answer. In the Indian investigations of 1781-2 Dundas's opinion of Hastings was distinctly unfavourable. The reports of Dundas's India Committee stigmatized Hastings's aggressive foreign policy and financial extravagance.<sup>2</sup> The result was the decision of the Board of Directors to recall him, which was later overruled by the Court of Proprietors. In April 1783 Dundas, in his speech on India, seemed to take it for granted that a new India Bill would mean a new Governor-General.<sup>3</sup> In November 1783 appears the first evidence that Dundas's opinion of Hastings was becoming more favourable. Hastings's friend, Major Scott, reported Dundas as having then said to him:

I once thought he [Mr. Hastings] could not make peace with the Mahrattas, but I have been mistaken. His relief and support of the Carnatic, his improvement of the revenues of Bengal, his spirit and activity claim every degree of praise that I can bestow upon him and every support that His Majesty's ministers can afford him.<sup>4</sup>

Probably the trustworthiness of Major Scott's reports ought to be somewhat discounted. His letters, which fill Gleig's *Memoirs of Warren Hastings*, the book reviewed in Macaulay's famous essay, are obviously written to please Hastings. No doubt Dundas's opinion had changed on receipt of the news of the successful termination of the disastrous war in the Carnatic, but

<sup>1</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, i. 232-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Gleig, *Memoirs of Warren Hastings*, iii. 107, quoted in Trotter, Capt. L. J., *Warren Hastings*, pp. 190-1.



it is hardly likely that he passed such a high encomium on Hastings in conversation with Major Scott, or that Scott could have remembered such a long tribute word for word. All we can be safe in saying is that Dundas, having learned wisdom from the discovery of the inaccuracies in the reports of the India Committees of 1781-2, revised somewhat the unfavourable view of Hastings which his vote of censure had expressed.

When Pitt's India Bill was introduced, Dundas probably did not expect that its passage would mean Hastings's recall. Burke, who was already hard at work to accomplish that end, found the new ministry's Indian policy far from encouraging. He certainly thought the new Government would be callous to Indian conditions and would neglect them. In a letter to Sir William Eden (later Lord Auckland), Burke said: 'I shall indeed be much disappointed if they [the ministry] suffer a single East India paper to be laid before their Parliament'.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, unlikely that Dundas, through the influence he had in the making of Pitt's Bill, deliberately plotted to bring about Hastings's dismissal. Nevertheless, in October 1784, when he had begun work at the Board of Control, Dundas was very anxious for Hastings's resignation and return. This appears to be absolutely conclusive from the following paragraph of Dundas's letter of October 27, 1784, to Grenville, then one of his colleagues on the India Board. Dundas then wrote:

I send you [Grenville] a copy of the minutes transmitted to me from the India House. I do not think they [the Court of Directors] can be very formidable; indeed acting on the principles we are doing nothing can be so if we have fair play, but that I plainly see we are not to have. We are appointed to control the civil and military affairs of India; at the head of the first, *will remain Mr. Hastings*. That you may depend upon. What is *still* worse, at the head of the second, will be General Sloper, of whom to say nothing, is,

<sup>1</sup> *Auckland Correspondence*, i. 77, Burke to Eden (Auckland), May 17, 1784

I believe, to say the best that can be said. Join to this a determined faction in the India House operating against us, and, to conclude, all the most obstinate part of H. M. ministers respectively countenancing the heads of faction both at home and in India. Under all these circumstances, it is Don Quixotism with a witness to attempt what we are attempting. I wish you in some other situation where your talents and integrity may do some good to the public. I wish myself again at the Bar where, if I can do no good to the public, I will at least escape the disgrace which, if I remain where I now am, I am positive awaits me.<sup>1</sup> [*Italics Dundas's.*]

From this letter, we are fairly safe in drawing the conclusion that 'fair play', to Dundas, meant full and complete co-operation from the East India Company's authorities in a policy of removing Warren Hastings from the Governor-Generalship.

Since this co-operation was withheld both by the Company and by Hastings's friends in high places, of whom the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow,<sup>2</sup> was the most prominent, the Board of Control was unwilling to use its power of recall without further support. Accordingly the dispute dragged on into the spring.<sup>3</sup> On March 4, 1785, Dundas wrote a long letter to Lord Thurlow, which is thus summarized by the compiler of the catalogue of 'Lord Melville's East India Correspondence':

Mr. Dundas to Lord Chancellor Thurlow, 4 March, 1785.

Mr. Dundas, while he fully admits the splendid talents of Mr. Hastings, contends that he is inadequate to carry into effect those retrenchments which are absolutely necessary for the salvation of India, and gives it as his opinion that Lord

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 13th Rept., App. III (1892), Dropmore MSS., i. 240. D. to Grenville, Oct. 27, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Pitt, himself, had no wish to include Lord Thurlow in the Cabinet. See Rose, *Pitt*, i. 156.

<sup>3</sup> On Dec. 4, 1784, Grenville wrote to Dundas: 'Hastings's last letter is such as to call loudly for strict and positive instructions to prevent our being involved in any wild projects of restoring Shah Alum or his son to the power and authority of former Emperors.' Hist. MSS. Comm., 13th Rept., App. III (1892), Dropmore MSS., i. 243.

Macartney,<sup>1</sup> being a man of integrity and firmness, is well calculated to be his successor, his lordship's differences with Mr. H[astings] are deplored but his conduct in refusing to give up the Nabob's assignment is vindicated. Mr. Dundas apprehends the want of Lord Thurlow's support may prove the subversion of the India Board, but they are determined manfully to discharge their duty.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Thurlow's reply, according to the compiler of this catalogue of Dundas's letters, revealed Thurlow as 'still of opinion that Lord Macartney is totally unfit to succeed Mr. Hastings whom Lord Thurlow does not expect to see replaced by anyone of equal merit, but it is for the India Board to decide, and their decision must be abided by'.<sup>3</sup> The tone of this exchange of letters would certainly lead us to the conclusion that no word had then arrived in England of Hastings's own determination to resign and return. Nevertheless, Dundas must have known, after Mrs. Hastings's return to England in the summer of 1784, that her husband had made up his mind to return if the new India Bill did not give him the support which he wished.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Dundas could not have been sure that such a return home meant Hastings's permanent retirement from the Governor-Generalship. Lord Thurlow apparently had good grounds for believing that Hastings's plans were subject to change. Hastings's own letters to his wife reveal his inability to decide his future course definitely. Even late in 1784, Hastings was willing to stay in India and remain away from his wife for at least a year longer, if the new Indian legislation proved satisfactory to him.<sup>5</sup> On account of the great difficulties of com-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Macartney, being on the spot as Governor of Madras, was suggested instead of Lord Cornwallis for reasons which will later be discussed. *Infra*, pp. 51, 53.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Catalogue of Lord M.'s East India Correspondence', in my possession.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Grier, S. C., *Letters of W. Hastings to his Wife*, p. 245. Letter dated Calcutta, Feb. 7, 1784, arrived overland via Bussorah, July 28, 1784, day of Mrs. H.'s arrival in England.

<sup>5</sup> Grier, *op. cit.*, letters XXIV-XXIX, pp. 291-407, which did not arrive in England until Apr. and May 1785, show that his decision to return was not absolutely final. See also letter to Scott, Dec. 27, 1784, *supra*.

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munication with India, it is not at all extraordinary  
that considerable confusion of mind as to Hastings's  
real intentions should have existed in England. On  
March 4, 1785, Dundas could have had no official and  
definite word of Hastings's resignation, for the letters  
written by Hastings after Pitt's Bill had arrived in  
India, December 20, 1784, together with Hastings's  
official resignation, dated January 1785, could not  
then have arrived.<sup>1</sup>

On the evidence of the letters to Grenville and Thurlow, it is practically certain that although Dundas in the spring of 1784 seems to have had no thought that Hastings's resignation would be the inevitable result of Pitt's Bill, he did do all he could at the new Board of Control in the autumn and winter to bring about Hastings's dismissal. That being so, what we have now to consider is Dundas's attitude towards Hastings *after* the latter had voluntarily resigned. As to this, all the evidence, which has as yet come to light,<sup>2</sup> except that of the gossip-mongers above mentioned,<sup>3</sup> points to the conclusion that Dundas was satisfied. It reveals no real anxiety to go so far as to abet the impeachment of Hastings, if it could be avoided. In this connexion, we must remember that Hastings's ill-considered attempt to defend himself in Parliament *before* the proceedings against him had reached the impeachment stage did much to make impeachment itself a logical and inevitable step.<sup>4</sup> Even before Hastings had resigned or arrived in England, the Opposition, under Burke's leadership, was determined on a thorough examination in Parliament of Hastings's conduct as Governor-General.<sup>5</sup> Under the circumstances, when actually confronted with the issue in 1785-6, Pitt and his

<sup>1</sup> Forrest, G. W., *Administration of Warren Hastings*, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Some interesting revelations may appear in the next volume of George III's Correspondence, edited by Sir John Fortescue.

<sup>3</sup> Wraxall and Bland Burges, *supra*.

<sup>4</sup> Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 228. Major Scott in Jan. 1786 'wearied the House with the wrongs of Hastings before they came officially before it'.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* i. 226-7; Newman, B., *Edmund Burke*, pp. 168-9.

friends were forced to take a guardedly neutral position.

Until the charge relating to the heavy fine levied on Cheyt Singh, the Zamindar<sup>1</sup> of Benares, was brought forward in June 1786, Dundas in his speeches stood consistently on the ground he had taken in his letter to Lord Thurlow in March 1785. He fully admitted the 'splendid talents' of Mr. Hastings. He held that the Indian Committees of 1781-2 which had resulted in his vote of censure had aimed only at Hastings's recall and not at a penal prosecution. Not only had Hastings's recall not resulted from these investigations, but three times in later years had Hastings been reappointed Governor-General of India with Parliament's approval. On these grounds, Dundas argued that a penal prosecution of Hastings for acts which had thus been tacitly overlooked was entirely uncalled for, especially in view of the great services which Hastings was generally admitted to have rendered during his many years in India. Dundas made no attempt to excuse the many questionable deeds of Hastings, or to reverse his former condemnation of the Rohilla War. He simply took the position that there was no need of an impeachment.<sup>2</sup>

To hold such a position, as the charges of Fox, Burke, and Sheridan became more fully developed, was increasingly difficult. The differences of opinion which will always exist among those who now attempt to pass judgement upon Warren Hastings's 'crimes'<sup>3</sup> must not make us forget that to the men of the eighteenth century the evidence which Burke had produced by June 13, 1786, had a very ill look indeed. While there is no need of supposing that Dundas was deeply grieved at the rising tide of evidence which made impeachment inevitable, there is, on the other hand, no

<sup>1</sup> Literally 'land owner'; see Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 232, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, i. 228-32; Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>3</sup> As Dr. J. Holland Rose says, *Pitt*, i. 226: 'The Hastings episode will ever range in hostile groups men of strongly marked dispositions; while the judicial minority will feel themselves drawn perplexingly first to the sentimental side and then to the practical side, as new facts and considerations emerge from the welter of evidence.'

need of assuming that Dundas, consumed by jealousy, eagerly abandoned the position which he had taken up in debate. The following two quotations from letters written by Dundas some months after Pitt's decision of June 13, 1786, to favour the impeachment, bear all the marks of sincerity. They are private; the second of them, that to Sir Archibald Campbell, is especially so. The first is to Lord Cornwallis. In it Dundas said:

The truth is, when we examined the various articles of charges against him [Hastings], with his defences, they were so strong and the defence so perfectly unsupported, it was impossible not to concur.<sup>1</sup>

The second is to Sir Archibald Campbell, Governor of Madras. After discussing the most intimate details as to the appointment of various minor officials, Dundas then concludes a paragraph on the parliamentary situation in March 1787 by saying:

The only circumstance unpleasing to our [i.e. Pitt's and Dundas's] Friends and of course to ourselves is the impeachment of Hastings, but there is no help for it. When Mr. Pitt and I examined the charges minutely and the defences made to them, it was impossible to refuse our concurrence to the impeachment. It will certainly go to the House of Lords.<sup>2</sup>

When the impeachment had actually begun, Dundas gave it very lukewarm support. Burke certainly did not regard Dundas as an eager and ardent worker animated by a jealous desire to crush Hastings. On March 26, 1787, Dundas wrote to Burke:

... For many reasons, we [Pitt and Dundas] cannot agree to take upon us any share in the management of the prosecution of Hastings, but we have given and shall continue to give that support to it which appears to us consistent with national justice and the credit of the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, i. 305.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., letter-book preserved at Eskbank 'Grange'. D. to Sir Archibald Campbell, Mar. 23, 1787 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Burke Corr., N.L.S., D. to Burke, Mar. 26, 1787 (copy), original presented by the late Marquess Curzon to the Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta. Selections from the Burke-Dundas letters are printed in the Appendix.

With this letter, Burke was not at all satisfied, and took it as evidence that Pitt and Dundas were not as ready to co-operate as they had hitherto been. In reply, he wrote to Dundas:

I shall say very little of my feelings with regard to the change of opinions which your letter announces. I look on it as the full adoption of the plan supposed to be Mr. Grenville's. I shall not prognosticate the total loss of our object from it, for, I am resolved to indulge some hope to animate me in this difficult pursuit to the last moment. . . . The hopes of those opposed to us will be raised and scope given to their cabals which, how powerful they are, I have no need to inform you. . . . I have no more doubt of Mr. Pitt's and your sincerity so far as you go with us than I have of my own. . . . But I must trouble for the effect of consultation with those who, by every indication, are adverse to all the substantial parts of the proceeding. . . . I am full of uneasiness and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

Burke's other letters betrayed intense nervousness and dissatisfaction at Dundas's disinclination to give the prosecution the fullest support. In these private letters Dundas was not addressed as one whose enmity toward Hastings was regarded as at all comparable to that of the writer and his friends. It would seem, therefore, that Burke could hardly have endorsed the view that Dundas, extremely jealous of Hastings, deliberately plotted and schemed to encompass Hastings's downfall.

With Hastings's famous trial, which dragged its slow length along until 1795, when a verdict of acquittal was finally brought in, we are not concerned. It but remains to sum up the evidence here set forth with regard to Dundas's conduct towards Hastings. Such a summary naturally falls into two parts, for there are really two questions to be answered. One is: What share of the responsibility for Hastings's impeachment belongs to Dundas? The other is: What were Dundas's own feelings towards Hastings? To neither of these can an absolutely conclusive answer be given. For lack of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* Burke to Dundas, Apr. 1, 1787 (original).

decisive evidence we must be content to answer each question as best we can from the facts which have been ascertained.

The first question can be approached and answered with far more assurance than the second. Everything considered, Dundas, whatever his own feelings or desires may have been, really had very little to do with bringing about Warren Hastings's impeachment. In any evaluation of the factors involved, he must, it would seem, occupy a very subordinate position. When he censured Hastings in 1782, he had no idea what the future held for himself or for Hastings. When, in 1784-5, he worked at the Board of Control for Hastings's dismissal, his efforts were, as it happened, of no real consequence, for Hastings would have resigned and returned to England if Dundas had never lifted a finger against him. Burke's prosecution of Hastings gathered its enormous momentum quite apart from anything that Dundas did or said. The impartiality with which Pitt, on June 13, 1786, made his famous decision to oppose Hastings has been established.<sup>1</sup> These being the circumstances, we are fairly safe in answering the first question by saying that Dundas's share of the responsibility for bringing on the Hastings impeachment was very small indeed.

The answer to the second question must be far more a matter of personal opinion. Was Dundas the extremely jealous man, eager for Warren Hastings's impeachment, described by Bland Burges? Was he involved from the first in a deep and clever intrigue to encompass Hastings's doom? It would seem very doubtful. Dundas was not a dark and deliberate schemer who nursed private grudges and allowed them to master him irrespective of all other considerations. He was, on the contrary, an easy-going opportunist, an affable politician, and an 'old parliamentary hand'. His conduct toward Hastings was just what might have been expected of him. His first official contact with

<sup>1</sup> i.e., by J. H. Rose, *o. supra*, p. 35.



Indian affairs gave him an unfavourable opinion of Hastings's financial management and aggressive foreign policy. As the years went by, he came to have a higher opinion of Hastings's talents and abilities, but he realized that new measures for the government of India would need new men to execute them. Hastings had done excellent work, but he was indissolubly connected with a system of Indian administration which both political parties in England admitted to be outworn. Dundas did not know Hastings personally. He even knew so little about him that he did not realize that Hastings's resignation and return from India would follow almost as a matter of course after the passage of Pitt's Bill. Accordingly, he went to work at once at the Board of Control to bring about Hastings's recall as the first step in the reorganization of the government of India. There is nothing in this to show that Dundas was planning for the impeachment of Hastings as his ultimate goal. In 1785-6 the leaders of the Opposition, the party which had favoured an India Bill diametrically opposed to the measures which Dundas was trying to put into effect, began an unexpectedly violent attack upon *all* aspects of Hastings's administration. The Government, including Dundas, was obliged to counter this by pointing out the more meritorious achievements of the newly returned Governor-General. It need not be thought that Dundas was very deeply grieved at the appearance of the clouds of censure which were gathering about Hastings's head, but he at least seems sincerely to have wished that impeachment might be avoided. What he would have done if Hastings had not been so deeply discredited by the work of Burke and Burke's friends, we have no means of knowing. It is easy to infer, in view of Dundas's obvious wish to have Hastings removed from the Governor-Generalship, that Dundas would have taken care to throw just enough discredit on Hastings to prevent his playing a dominant role in Indian affairs. Such speculation is, however, beside

the point. Dundas needed to do nothing of the kind, and we must have more proof before we impugn the sincerity of his statements that he did not wish for the impeachment. There is nothing to show that Dundas when he talked with Pitt in June 1786 was jealously eager to force impeachment upon his unwilling chief. In the light of such facts as have been discovered, it is far more probable that Pitt and Dundas, having considered quietly and sanely the ever-increasing mass of evidence against Hastings, decided that the Prime Minister could not avoid giving his concurrence to the prosecution. Our answer to the second question, therefore, must be that, while Dundas did not wish Hastings to play a dominant role in Indian affairs, the charges that he either plotted secretly over many years for Hastings's ruin or jealously desired to see Hastings dragged through the mire of impeachment have yet to be proved.

On Hastings's return, Dundas was not only confronted with the problem of selecting a new Governor-General. The whole system of Indian administration had to be reorganized and placed on the new basis of Pitt's India Act. From 1784 until 1791 when he became Home Secretary, Dundas gave to Indian affairs most of his hours which were not taken up with the political management of the House of Commons. His favourite daughter, Montagu, with whom he later loved to go riding, described her father's daily routine in a letter to her grandmother:

Papa is very much hurried. Indeed just now [1785] he is always out riding by seven o'clock in the morning. He sometimes breakfasts at Putney with Mr. Pitt and sometimes at his own office in the City. From thence he goes to the India Board, where he stays until two or three o'clock. Then he sometimes comes home to dress, but he oftener dresses at the office and goes down to the House of Commons, or else he comes to Leicester Square and takes a family dinner before going down to the House. If there is nothing particular there, he goes to the India Board again at seven o'clock and stays

until eleven, when he comes home to supper. I never see him the whole day unless he dines at home.<sup>1</sup>

When Dundas began work at the India Board, the British Empire in India comprised the provinces of Bengal and Behar in the north-east, the city of Madras with a large area of the surrounding territory on the south-east coast, and the island city of Bombay with a very small area of the surrounding territory on the west coast. In theory, there still reigned at Delhi a Mogul Emperor from whom both European and native rulers derived their powers. In fact, there was no centralized authority. Certain princes, especially the Nawab Vizir of Oudh and the Nawab of the Carnatic, were almost wholly under British influence. The so-called Northern Circars, which formed a long strip of territory on the east coast, although nominally under the Nizam Ali, the great Mohammedan prince in central India, were British in all but name. In the 1780's the Nizam, the Sultan of Mysore in the interior of the southern peninsula, and the leading chieftains of the great Mahratta confederacy, who usually at this time controlled the puppet Emperor at Delhi and most of central Hindustan, were the only native powers of any consequence. There were, no doubt, small establishments in India belonging to other European powers, notably those of the Portuguese at Goa and Diu and those of the French at Pondicherry and Chandernagore. In the island of Ceylon, Dutch supremacy had been re-established in 1783.

Dundas found the East India Company's foreign relations in a more satisfactory state than they had been for many years. Warren Hastings had finally made peace with the principal native powers. The treaty of Salbai with the Mahrattas and the treaty of Mangalore with Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, were made on precisely the same terms. In each treaty both parties were mutually pledged to withhold all help from the enemies

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., p. 52. Montagu Dundas to her grandmother, Apr. 29, 1785.

of the other. This proved embarrassing when open war broke out between Tippoo and the Mahrattas in 1785-6. The question of the day was whether or not the British should fight Tippoo on the ground that he had broken the Treaty of Mangalore by allowing too much French influence at his court. Nevertheless there was no immediate need of war. The French influence was not such as to warrant a real fear that France would regain her Indian empire, and the indecisive war between Tippoo and the Mahrattas could go on without disturbing the stability of British power. It was the domestic affairs of the Company which gave real concern to the Board of Control. Pitt's Bill was received with a great deal of dissatisfaction by the Company's servants in India. The vexed question of the Nawab of the Carnatic's debts remained to be settled. The departure of Hastings left the Supreme Government temporarily in the hands of Sir John MacPherson, a weak and conceited official utterly unable to cope with the situation.

The rank and file of the Company's officials were particularly indignant at the clauses of Pitt's Act which attempted to put a check upon corruption. They were incensed by the requirement that every official should submit under oath a complete inventory of all his property on returning from India.<sup>1</sup> The Company's military officers were disturbed at the Government's intention to increase the numbers and importance of the King's officers and troops serving in India.<sup>2</sup> There were even rumours that the British in India might declare their political independence. Speaking of

<sup>1</sup> 24 Geo. III, c. 25, clause 55. For account of discontent, see I. O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., Jan. 27, 1785 and Feb. 14, 1785; Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Col. W. Fullarton to D., Dec. 20, 1783 (précis), Col. Cathcart to Pitt, Oct. 12, 1785 (précis), Sir Chas. Oakley to Alex Brodie, Jan. 8, 1785 (précis).

<sup>2</sup> Melville MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Lt.-Col. Henry Malcolm to D., Jan. 31, 1784, Feb. 2, 1784, Oct. 1, 1785 (précis); *ibid.*, Maj. Jas. Rennel to D., July 5, 1784 (précis). See also Mel. MSS., lot 710, Edwards, Malcolm to D., Oct. 4, 1785; and Forrest, G. W., *Selections from State Papers*, Lord Cornwallis, vol. i (introduction, *passim*).

Hastings, George Smith, a Bengal revenue official, said in a letter to Dundas in January 1785:

. . . Were he [Hastings] not faithful and loyal, he might have attempted, and successfully a dismemberment of this country from the British Empire.<sup>1</sup>

In the same letter Smith urged Dundas on no account to yield to any attempt to repeal the Act of 1784 because of the ill-feeling which it had caused in India. In his opinion it was the repeal of the Stamp Act which caused the Americans to carry on to independence. Several months later, Smith wrote to Dundas from Calcutta:

. . . The furor of petitioning against the late Bill, in consequence of an application from hence, has reached Madras and probably will extend to Bombay. Let not this however alarm Administration [Pitt's Cabinet], whose acts should be firm, resolute, decisive and manly, and if so, the effects of discontent in India will only appear on paper and all chimerical ideas of Independence will droop and drop, for our condition is very different indeed to that of the Irish or Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The application of such a policy undoubtedly accomplished a great deal. It is significant that Smith reported none of the Scottish officials as having attended the meetings of protest.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the success of the reorganization of India depended primarily on the selection of able men for the highest positions in the Indian Service. In this task, as we have already pointed out, the Board of Control did not possess an entirely free hand. In spite of the great power which the Board, through the threat of recall, could exercise over the appointments made by the Company, harmony and good government demanded that much attention should be paid to the wishes of the Proprietors and Directors.

<sup>1</sup> I. O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., Jan. 27, 1785.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Geo. Smith to D., Oct. 20, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Geo. Smith to D., Dec. 5, 1785.

The selection of Hastings's successor was made especially difficult by the ever-present question of the Nawab of the Carnatic's debts. These debts had been a thorn in the side of both the Company and the Home Government for many years and had been at the root of those scandals in the Madras Presidency which Dundas's committee investigated in 1781-2. To determine exactly to what extent the claims of the Nawab's English creditors were fraudulent would be almost as impossible now as it was in 1785. Suffice it to say that the scandal had reached such proportions by 1780 that the Company thought it wise to send out a *novus homo* as Governor of Madras. In appointing George, Lord Macartney, they broke their usual policy of preferring only those officials who had had Indian experience. The invasion of the Carnatic by Hyder Ali, father of Tippoo, enabled Lord Macartney to make a treaty with the Nawab whereby the revenues of the Carnatic were taken in charge by the Madras government for five years.<sup>1</sup> When Dundas and his colleagues took up the question, that period was almost up. The Board and the Company would have to agree upon a decision which would settle the matter permanently. Meanwhile, Lord Macartney, by refusing the usual *douceurs* from the Nawab and others, had gained a reputation for personal integrity which had seldom been approached in the whole history of the Madras Presidency. His administration was, on the other hand, unfortunately filled with acrimonious quarrels between himself, Hastings, and General Stuart, which made his transference from Madras to some other post almost inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

In this way it came about that the Board of Control was confronted, at almost the same time, with two major problems: the selection of a new Governor-General and the permanent settlement of the Nawab's

<sup>1</sup> Robbins, H. H., *Lord Macartney, Our First Ambassador to China*, pp. 119-49, also Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.* i. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Robbins, H. H., *op. cit.*, chapters on Lord Macartney's India career.

debts. As has already been pointed out,<sup>1</sup> Dundas had wished, ever since 1782, for Lord Cornwallis's appointment as Governor-General of India. When Pitt's India Bill was going through its final stages in August 1784, the plan was again broached to Lord Cornwallis. Cornwallis's reply rather damped the Government's hopes that he could be persuaded to go to India. On August 4, 1784, in a letter to Lord Sydney, Cornwallis said:

. . . If I sought for the place of Governor-General, I should not only abandon a profession to which I have from my youth wholly turned my thoughts, . . . but I should feel myself in competition with some person whose habits of business would render him much more proper for the office than myself. I will besides own that the army is a favourite passion and I cannot give it up. But after acknowledging my predilection for the military line, I cannot undertake the command in India, being convinced that in the present circumscribed situation of the Commander-in-chief without power or patronage, an officer could neither get credit to himself, nor essentially serve the public.<sup>2</sup>

So the matter rested until it became imperatively necessary to determine on Hastings's successor early in 1785.

Meanwhile, Hastings had written to the Court of Directors strongly criticizing Lord Macartney for refusing to promise to restore the revenues of the Carnatic to the Nawab. Lord Macartney, on receipt of Hastings's orders to restore the revenues, had appealed to the Home Government. On receipt of these despatches, the Board of Control could no longer delay making the final decision. The Board, therefore, decided that Hastings's authority must be upheld and decreed that the administration of the revenues should be restored to the Nawab in accordance with the treaty. This was done, the Board declared, for the purpose of giving to all the powers of India a strong proof of the national

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 17, quoted from Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, i. 173.

faith.<sup>1</sup> This decision of the Board with regard to the Nawab of the Carnatic is open to the severest criticism. It restored the revenues of the Carnatic not to the Nawab but to the Nawab's creditors, an unprincipled crew led by one Paul Benfield, who is known to have bought up several seats in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Between 1784 and 1804 £5,000,000 were paid to claimants against the Nawab, and, when the debts were finally liquidated in the years 1805-14, claims to the amount of £19,000,000 out of £20,000,000 were rejected as fraudulent.<sup>3</sup>

The ministerial scandals connected with this decision to restore the revenues of the Carnatic to the Nawab probably were never unravelled. Burke implicated Dundas and many other persons prominent in either the Government or the Company. As regards Dundas, it may be said against him that James MacPherson, the Nawab's agent in England, was cousin to John MacPherson, then of the Bengal Council (later Governor-General *pro tempore* on Hastings's departure), who owed his rise in the Indian service to profits gained on loans to the Nawab, and who was connected with Sir Adam Ferguson, the Scottish historian, a fairly intimate friend of Dundas. On the other hand, the correspondence of John MacPherson with James MacPherson and with Dundas gives no proof that Dundas was hand in glove with the MacPhersons and other creditors.<sup>4</sup> When MacPherson became Governor-General temporarily on Hastings's return, his letters are those of a sycophantic flatterer whose only aim was to please the minister in power. Of MacPherson, who

<sup>1</sup> Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 11; cf. Barrow, Sir John, *Life of Lord Macartney*: 'It was deemed expedient by H. M.'s ministers to show the Nabob another instance of the honour and generosity of the British nation, however undeserving he had proved himself', quoted in Robbins, H. H., *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler, J. T., *A Short History of India*, p. 380, n. 3, p. 381, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, appears to contain all the John MacPherson-Dundas letters. In 1802, Dundas spoke of the debts then existing as 'much better founded in justice than those which we found ourselves, at that early period I have alluded to, under the necessity of confirming.' Mel. MSS. in my possession, Dundas to Castlereagh, Oct. 3, 1802 (copy).



soon became known as 'Johnny McShuffle',<sup>1</sup> Dundas himself expressed a low opinion in 1787.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing has been found to implicate Dundas directly in the corruption connected with the transactions of the Nawab's creditors. In fact, there is far more evidence in his favour on this question than there is against him. The decision was politically expedient and it at least had the merit of disposing of a question which had been a constant source of irritation in Indian government. It should be remembered that the influence which the Nawab's creditors could bring to bear on the Company's Proprietors and Directors was very strong indeed. Had Dundas been hand in glove with the creditors he would have allowed the Company to pursue its old policy of filling the highest offices in India with its former servants. As it was, he did nothing of the kind. In the spring of 1785 he insisted that Lord Macartney, whose integrity was unquestioned, should succeed Hastings as Governor-General.<sup>3</sup> Had it been possible, he would have been glad to have Lord Cornwallis as Commander-in-Chief.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his insistence that Lord Macartney, who was intimate with Burke and Fox, be transferred to Bengal instead of being allowed to come home caused serious differences of opinion in the Cabinet. We have already seen with what opposition Lord Thurlow combated this project. Pitt, knowing that Lord Cornwallis was the only person who would satisfy Dundas if Macartney were not appointed, attempted to smooth matters over by appealing to Lord Cornwallis. Accordingly, Lord Cornwallis was, as he himself put it, 'again most violently attacked' early in 1785 to accept the Governor-Generalship.<sup>5</sup> In answer to a 'kind and flattering' letter from Pitt, Lord Cornwallis had a brief interview with Pitt, who

<sup>1</sup> I.O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., Dec. 5, 1785.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir Archibald Campbell, July 26, 1787.

<sup>3</sup> Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* i. 18.

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then sent him to see Dundas.<sup>1</sup> From Dundas he 'easily found out' that the Cabinet wished him to go to India 'merely to get rid of a momentary rub among themselves'. He therefore refused.<sup>2</sup> There was nothing for the Cabinet to do but yield to Dundas's insistence that Lord Macartney be offered the Governor-Generalship.

When the dispatches containing this news arrived at Calcutta in the summer of 1785, Lord Macartney was already there. He had resigned his Governorship and left Madras a month or two before, on receipt of the news that the Board of Control had authorized the restoration of the Carnatic revenues to the Nawab.<sup>3</sup> On account of his increasing ill-health and his disgust at the triumph of the Nawab's creditors, he lost no time in refusing the offer of the Governor-Generalship, and, shortly thereafter, embarked for home.<sup>4</sup> Naturally, this was not known in England for several months. Dundas cannot therefore be blamed for keeping the incompetent<sup>5</sup> John MacPherson in office. MacPherson's tenure of the Governor-Generalship for eighteen months—February 1785–September 1786—was due to causes over which Dundas had very little control.

Four days after Lord Macartney arrived in London, January 9, 1786, he went into conference with the Chairman and Deputy-Chairman of the Company. He pointed out that he was not anxious to return on account of his health and certainly would not return unless the military power were made entirely dependent on the civil. Other reforms which he insisted upon were: promotion by rule of seniority, choice of candidates for important offices from men not in the

<sup>1</sup> Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Robbins, H. H., *op. cit.*, pp. 149–51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152–7.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, Sir John Shore to D., Mar. 7, 1787: 'Mr. MacPherson seldom did anything but write.' The same to the same, Mar. 15, 1787: 'Lord Cornwallis found a government contemptible for its imbecility.' Lord Cornwallis to D., Aug. 24, 1786: 'Gen. Sloper has rode MacPherson without mercy. Many of his jobbs must be undone.' Mel. MSS., lot 720, Edwards, John Barrow to D., July 18, 1806: 'Sir John MacPherson appears to have played a double game.'

Company's service, and complete control of the Council by the Governor-General. In his speeches Pitt praised Macartney for everything he had done at Madras except the refusal to obey Hastings's orders with regard to the Carnatic. The negotiations for Macartney's return to India really broke down on the Government's refusal to confer upon him a British peerage.<sup>1</sup> Dundas and Pitt then appealed to Lord Cornwallis for the third time. They were not disappointed. The old soldier agreed to go if he were allowed to hold both the office of Governor-General and the office of Commander-in-Chief and if he were given complete authority to override the Council.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly an Act was passed which empowered the Governor-General in special cases to adopt, suspend, or repeal a measure on his own sole responsibility. This India Act of 1786 also allowed the Governor-General to hold the office of Commander-in-Chief.<sup>3</sup> No one was better pleased with this arrangement than Lord Macartney, who then wrote: 'I am the happiest man in England at this hour. Lord Cornwallis, I hear, is Governor-General of India'.<sup>4</sup> In this way, Dundas's wish to see Indian corruption and intrigue combated by Lord Cornwallis was finally gratified. No one could have been more objectionable to all Anglo-Indian speculators. Dundas also saw to it that Lord Cornwallis had an able ally in a new Governor of Madras, Sir Archibald Campbell, a man whose youth had been spent in India as an engineer in the Company's service, but who had since retired and served in the American War. Not at all pleased with the prospect of Madras's falling into the hands of Lord

<sup>1</sup> Forrest, G. W., *op. cit.*, Lord Cornwallis, i. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 19. Ld. Cornwallis to Col. Ross, Feb. 23, 1786: 'The proposal of going to India has been pressed upon me so strongly, with the circumstance of the Governor-General's being independent of the council as intended in Dundas's former Bill of Apr. 1783, and having the supreme command of the military, that, much against my will, and with grief of heart, I have been obliged to say "yes", and to exchange a life of ease and content, to encounter all the plagues and miseries of command and public station.'

<sup>3</sup> 26 Geo. III, c. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Robbins, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

Macartney's senior councillor, Alexander Davidson, Dundas had persuaded the Court of Directors to appoint Sir Archibald as Lord Macartney's provisional successor as early as March 9, 1785. On April 6, 1786, Sir Archibald Campbell arrived at Madras and took up his duties as governor there, five months before Lord Cornwallis arrived at Calcutta. A year later, Dundas wrote happily to Lady Campbell: 'I am perfectly sensible that my importunities carried both Sir Archibald and Lord Cornwallis to India'.<sup>1</sup>

We are not here concerned with the history of India during Lord Cornwallis's administration, which is famous chiefly for two things: the land settlement of Bengal and the war of 1790-2 with Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore. It is also unnecessary to take up in detail the history of Madras under Sir Archibald Campbell, or that of Bombay under Major-General William Medows, who was shortly appointed to that post. We are more concerned with the way in which Dundas approached certain Indian problems and the methods whereby he tried to produce harmony between the various branches of Indian administration both at home and in India. In these matters, the letters which he wrote to Sir Archibald Campbell may be our chief guide.

In these, Dundas was speaking as a friend to a friend. As he said in the letter already mentioned, in which he discussed the dangers of too much 'Scotticization',<sup>2</sup> it was his desire to 'think aloud' with Sir Archibald on every subject. With regard to general administrative problems, Dundas had three aims in view: to discourage speculation and plotting, to give the high authorities in India the largest possible amount of power and responsibility, and to welcome suggestions for the betterment of the Government's Indian policy from every source. In his letter of July 26, 1787, he said:

. . . Lord Cornwallis and you have gone to India, not like

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Lady Campbell, Aug. 2, 1787. For a short memoir of Sir A. Campbell, see Campbell, Sir D., *Records of Clan Campbell in H. E. I. C.*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, p. 33.

former Governors for the purpose of enriching yourselves, or providing for needy connexions, but you have undertaken the much nobler task of redeeming a lost empire, and upon that foundation, establishing a monument to your own fame in the gratitude and affection of your country. I shall continue to exert myself to prevent every person who shall attempt to get out irregularly to India, and the very best advice I can give you as a sincere friend is to intimate to all those who have come out to you with false expectations of promotion and protection that the best thing they can do is to go home quickly.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas always thought of the function of the Board of Control as one of general supervision. He insisted that India was to be governed in India and not in Downing or Leadenhall Street. His duty, as he conceived it, was to present the Indian Budget in Parliament, to see to it that the Company appointed suitable men to the highest positions, to give those men every degree of confidence, to smooth over any differences between the Governor-General and his subordinates, and to inform judges, governors, and commanders-in-chief of the trends of home opinion. It was understood that any great decision involving war, or treaty obligations with native powers, would be discussed in Parliament. Nevertheless, such decisions were to stand unless the Board of Control recalled the offending official. His tone to Sir Archibald Campbell was not that of command, but rather that of friendly advice, or, if necessary, of equally friendly disapproval. For example, he took Sir Archibald to task for egotism in these sentences:

. . . One word more upon this subject regarding yourself. It is a fault of all the despatches of former governors of India to be mixt with an insufferable quantity of egotism. The fact is I have never felt the disposition to give Sir John MacPherson all the credit he on so many occasions deserves, because he said so much of himself.<sup>2</sup>

A year later, Dundas expressed clearly his opinion that

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir A. Campbell, July 26, 1787 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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the governor on the spot should be given entire  
responsibility:

. . . I told them [the Court of Directors] that my opinion was and ever should be, distinctly this, that while a governor in India was permitted to remain in his situation the Appointment to Offices should be left to him who was to be responsible for the measures to be carried into execution, and that the moment any other principle was acted upon, that moment responsibility ceased to rest with the governors and reverted to the Court of Directors, which was in other words saying that it existed nowhere . . . We shall feel ourselves as jealous of your honour as of our own, and you shall not have my wish to stay an hour in your government when anything is done to injure your credit or diminish your utility.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas was equally insistent that all negotiations of an exclusively Indian character should be carried on through the government in India. There were still in London agents of the native Indian powers who were trying to gain the ear of Parliament and Cabinet. To these agents, Dundas gave no encouragement. In 1785, he wrote to John Morrison, a self-styled 'ambassador of the Grand Mogul', that his letters would continue to be ignored unless they were sent to the Governor-General.<sup>2</sup> Of James MacPherson, agent of the Nawab of the Carnatic and also of the Mogul, Dundas wrote to Sir Archibald Campbell:

. . . It is very wrong to make Indian Powers think they can act through agents in England. You will make it absolutely clear to the Nabob and others that the British Government acts in India only through its agents there. MacPherson is a useful political agent, but he is not allowed to conduct such negotiations.<sup>3</sup>

The welcome which Dundas gave to criticism of

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir A. Campbell, Apr. 9, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 766, Edwards, contains seven letters of Morrison to D., Pitt, and the Earl of Dunmore, with a copy of one reply from D., Apr. 12, 1785.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir Archibald Campbell, Mar. 31, 1788 (copy). Cf. also D. to James MacPherson, Mar. 21, 1787, in which Dundas welcomes information about the Nawab, but refuses, as it is addressed to him personally, to lay it before the Board, and reminds MacPherson of the Board's rule not to act with native powers except through its representatives in India.

the Board of Control's work reveals unusual open-mindedness. His own correspondence and the files of the 'Home Miscellaneous' letters in the India Office bear witness to his attempts to keep abreast of a large mass of letters sent to him by persons interested in India. He even took care, if he had no time to reply, to instruct the Secretary of the Board to convey his appreciation to the writers.<sup>1</sup> Of his habit of welcoming criticism and suggestion of all sorts, he wrote:

. . . I make it a rule to receive both verbal and written communications from every person who offers me information on Indian affairs. I get some very good, and likewise some very great [?] stuff in consequence of it, but I think it right and am resolved to continue it. I send you two papers which in that way have come into my hands.<sup>2</sup>

He also had no hesitation in submitting to the governors in India opinions which differed from his own. In 1788 he enclosed the following note with a packet of papers sent to Sir Archibald Campbell:

. . . The enclosed was put into my hands by Mr. John Sullivan [a Director]. The tendency of it is to dispute an opinion I have often urged that the most material check to act upon against the ambitions of our Indian enemies, was from the Western parts of India. I am not induced by it to alter my own opinion, but I think it right to convey to you the arguments which a very sensible man urges against them.<sup>3</sup>

In the appointment of minor officials, Dundas wished to discourage objectionable nepotism, to have recommendations made through the government in India, and to gain a greater control over the Court of Directors in the making of appointments. Although there is no gainsaying the fact that Dundas was partial to his own relatives and to his own countrymen, his letters to Sir Archibald Campbell show a real anxiety to prevent nepotism of an unjust and dangerous sort. He complained bitterly of the large numbers of

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, William Cabell to George Smith, Aug. 2, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Sir A. Campbell, July 27, 1787 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 31, 1788.

hangers-on whom Sir Archibald's friends insisted upon sending to India. He took Sir Archibald to task for being too lenient towards such office-seekers.<sup>1</sup> On the point that posts should in so far as possible be given through the recommendations of the governors on the spot and not through favouritism at home, Dundas was sufficiently definite. He wrote that it was absolutely necessary that the governor should provide him with confidential information about all candidates for office so that the Board of Control might do its best in influencing the Court of Directors.<sup>2</sup> In 1788, he wrote to Sir Archibald Campbell:

. . . Would it not be well to express your wishes respecting him [a certain candidate for office] to Lord Cornwallis, for it is a great object of my wishes to enforce as much as possible the Propriety of Appointments of all kinds flowing from recommendations on the spot rather than proceeding from influence at home.<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which the Court of Directors often thwarted his own and the India governors' desires with regard to appointments was a sore point with Dundas.<sup>4</sup> The Court of Directors were especially obstinate about accepting Sir Archibald Campbell's nominees because, as Dundas put it, they naturally looked upon Campbell as the Governor of the Board of Control rather than as their own choice.<sup>5</sup> In order to combat this obstinacy, Dundas began the task of forming a party at the India House which would support the Board of Control, but the work progressed slowly. In April 1788 Dundas wrote of this to Sir Archibald Campbell:

. . . [I] remind you that by the system of Indian Government under which we act, the spirit of the times renders it necessary to leave the exercise of the Patronage without

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir A. Campbell, July 26, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 23, 1787.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, July 13, 1788.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 23, 1787; July 26, 1787; Apr. 9, 1788. See also *ibid.*, D. to Col. Abercrombie, Apr. 8, 1789, where Dundas still speaks of the condition as one 'continual altercation', and also *ibid.*, D. to Gen. Wm. Medows, Aug. 6, 1789.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Sir A. Campbell, July, 26, 1787.



controul in the Company. If, therefore, they are obstinate on any question of appointments either at home or abroad, we must acquiesce and so things must remain until matters are otherwise arranged. It is surprising we have had so little altercation with them on matters of that kind, and I trust the pains we have taken of late to secure an unbounded influence in the Court of Proprietors, and of course in the Court of Directors, will relieve us in the future from any altercations whatever on any topics. When I say 'unbounded', I mean only from the confidence they have got in the good government of the country in our hands, for we have no other means of influence either with them or the publick. Indeed, it is the only influence worth having.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, Dundas's appointment policy as regards India in the 1780's does not seem to have been unduly influenced by personal and partisan considerations, nor does he seem to have encouraged governors and commanders-in-chief in India to make their recommendations on such grounds. Unquestionably, he tended to favour his countrymen and to provide for his relatives,<sup>2</sup> but he did not allow his partiality to go to dangerous lengths. As regards the highest ranks of the Indian services, there is little doubt that Dundas wished to place himself above any imputations of personal or partisan bias. Of the way in which he and Pitt worked together with the best interests of India in mind, Dundas wrote in July 1787:

. . . We [Pitt and Dundas] should be distressed if both of you [Sir Archibald Campbell and Lord Cornwallis] were to come away at the same time. We are satisfied that military men are the most proper for the situations you hold, but it is difficult to find those proper in all respects to be trusted with such important concerns. Our present wish is to persuade General Medows to go to Bombay and first succeed you at Madras and then Lord Cornwallis at Bengal ; but the subject remains as yet a secret in our own breasts and therefore must be so in yours, for we are uncertain whether Medows will go,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 6, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Among relatives employed in the India service were: General Francis Dundas (nephew), Philip Dundas (nephew, later Governor of Prince of Wales Island), William Dundas (nephew, later member of the Board of Control, 1787), and others.

for I understand he has always pled an incapacity to engage in Civil business. Those who know him [Medows], which is not my case, say his scruples on that point are altogether unfounded. I hope therefore he will not decline, for if he does, I am sure I know not where to look next, and even if he accepts, I suppose the Court of Directors will be refractory, but if it rests there, it must be got the better of, somehow or other.<sup>1</sup>

In these early years at the Board of Control Dundas was not merely concerned with the administrative problems of British India; he had also to pay attention to those larger imperial interests which the possession of a predominant position in India brought to Great Britain. He and his associates in Indian affairs naturally wished to widen the sphere of British influence throughout the East by means of commercial agreements and treaties. Moreover, they could not fail to consider how British interests might best be served by the judicious annexation of the Eastern and African possessions of other European powers in the event of war. In the years following the loss of the American colonies, India was the centre and focal point of British imperial interests, and the correspondence of Dundas as unofficial 'minister for India' contains letters from those who were furthering the expansion of British trade and dominion all over the globe. It was not only Asia and Africa which were bound up with Indian affairs; both North and South America were likewise involved. In 1785, for example, George Smith wrote to Dundas from Calcutta of the necessity of checking an attempt of United States' citizens to trade with India. The first ships under the Stars and Stripes to arrive in Indian harbours had made their presence felt.<sup>2</sup> As for South America, it may be noted that in 1787 Andrew Johnstone, later

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir A. Campbell, July 26, 1787 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> I.O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., Aug. 5, 1785. This letter describes the arrival at Calcutta in June 1785 of the first ship under the United States' flag. See also Mel. MSS., in my possession, Macartney to the Court of Directors, July 27, 1785.

Governor of Dominica, wrote to Dundas of the utility of the island of Trinidad to East Indian commerce.<sup>1</sup>

The possessions of the Dutch in Africa and Asia aroused keen speculation in Great Britain at this time. In the late 1780's it required the best efforts of British diplomacy to stabilize the disturbed political conditions in the United Provinces and prevent them from concluding a virtual alliance with France. The possibility that Great Britain would be obliged to curtail French influence in Dutch possessions in Africa and Asia by force was always present. In 1782 Colonel Patrick Ross wrote to Dundas at length of the causes of the failure of the British expedition against the Cape of Good Hope which was determined on when the United Provinces joined France in the American War.<sup>2</sup> In January 1786 a certain Mr. George Forster of the Madras Civil Service wrote that the Dutch, since the war, had paid particular attention to the Cape, and that the French in the island of Mauritius depended upon the Cape for their supplies.<sup>3</sup> There can be little doubt that Dundas's interest in the Cape and his appreciation of the importance of the acquisition of it, should the opportunity arise, date from the very beginning of his connexion with Indian affairs.

The island of Ceylon was of course regarded as one of the most important Dutch possessions in the East. Its acquisition in the event of war was almost universally desired, and, while peace continued, there was discussion about commercial agreements which would give the British control over the factory at Trincomalee on the north coast.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Dundas written just before Hastings's departure from India, Sir John MacPherson bemoaned the failure to send a successful

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', in my possession, A. C. Johnstone to D., Apr. 4, 1787 (précis).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. Patrick Ross to D., Nov. 3, 1782 (précis).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, George Forster to D., Jan. 22, 1786 (précis). He also discusses the strength of the Dutch garrison and the oppressive nature of the government. He praises the new Governor, Van de Graaf.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Ld. Auckland (William Eden), Aug. 23, 1791 (copy), refers to former British offers for Trincomalee.

expedition to capture Ceylon before peace was made with the Dutch.<sup>1</sup> From Mr. George Smith, Dundas received in 1786 a list of the Dutch ships in Ceylon and at Batavia in Java together with the information that cinnamon alone defrayed the expenses of Ceylon and yielded a profit of about £300,000. He also suggested that England lend the Dutch money to pay off their French creditors.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, Andrew Ramsay, Governor of Bombay, reported that, as a result of rumours of war in Europe, the French at Pondicherry, under General Conway, proceeded to Ceylon to reinforce the Dutch, but were refused admittance by the Dutch governor, Van de Graaf.<sup>3</sup> Colonel Alexander Ross, Lord Cornwallis's secretary, in the same year wrote to Dundas of plans for the future British acquisition of Ceylon.<sup>4</sup> With the Dutch possessions in the Malay archipelago, the British do not seem to have been particularly concerned at this time. This lack of interest is probably explained by doubts as to the value of the spice trade.<sup>5</sup> The British did, however, pay attention to one island in this region. On the 17th of July, 1786, the island now called Penang off the coast of the Malay peninsula was ceded by the Sultan of Kedah to the East India Company, who named it Prince of Wales Island.<sup>6</sup> A year earlier, George Smith had urged on Dundas the necessity of British acquisitions in Malaya to protect the route to China, since the Dutch had secured a firm grip on Rhio and other islands in the Straits.<sup>7</sup> He suggested the purchase of the island of Tunk Ceylon, now known as Puket,

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 704, Edwards, John MacPherson to D., Dec. 10, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', in my possession, Geo. Smith to D., Mar. 12, 1786 (précis).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Andrew Ramsay to D., May 3, 1788 (précis).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Alexander Ross to D., Nov. 7, 1788 (précis).

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Lord Auckland, Aug. 23, 1791 (copy). Since the seventeenth century the British East India Company's only possession in this region had been Benkulen, on the southern coast of Sumatra.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., xxi. 84.

<sup>7</sup> I.O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., May 27, 1785. Rhio is now spelled Riouw and gives its name to an administrative district of Netherlands India with capital at Tanjong Pinang.

somewhat north of Penang. He felt that if such an island were not acquired, 'the Imperialists, French, Dutch, Danes, Americans, will make themselves masters to the great detriment of our Bengal and China trade'. 'In their hands,' he concluded, 'and particularly in those of the Dutch, this island would become an oriental Eustatia.'<sup>1</sup>

These years, 1785 and 1786, also saw the completion of the negotiations for the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786 by Sir William Eden (Lord Auckland). Throughout the proceedings, and even after the treaty had been made, care was taken to prevent the new French East India Company from gaining undue influence over the Dutch East India Company, whose financial condition became increasingly unstable owing to the political unrest in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> French activities in the territory between India and the Mediterranean likewise demanded attention. In January 1786 Hailes, Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris, reported that the unsettled state of Egypt was attracting the attention of the French Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> In March 1786 George Smith wrote to Dundas that the French had been unsuccessful in an attempt to gain control of the island of Kharak at the upper end of the Persian Gulf.<sup>4</sup> During the following year John Morrison, the self-styled 'ambassador' of the Great Mogul, corresponded with Dundas in regard to Persia.<sup>5</sup> When in Persia, Morrison had been invited to enter the Persian service by Ji'afir Khan, who had succeeded to the throne in 1786. In his conversations with Morrison this Khan had expressed great regard for the English because they had helped to drive the Portuguese from the island

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> See Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 327; and also Hist. MSS. Comm., 13th Rept., App. III, Dropmore MSS. i. 279, Grenville to D., Aug. 26, 1787, where Grenville mentions a Mr. Boers's negotiations with D. for the union of the Dutch and English companies.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, i. 327.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Geo. Smith to D., Mar. 12, 1786 (précis).

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 766, Edwards.

of Ormuz. The Khan professed himself willing to open negotiations. In return for British officers, ammunition, and clothing for his army, he would cede to the British the port of Gombroon (now Bunder Abbas) at the entrance to the Persian Gulf together with exclusive trading rights. Morrison therefore drew up a treaty along these lines, which he sent to Dundas. He mentioned French designs on Persia and told of the journey of a certain Count de Terzeira in the French interest.<sup>1</sup> Although Morrison's proposals were not acted upon, Dundas himself seems to have appreciated their importance. In 1791 Morrison wrote to Grenville: 'Mr. Dundas thinks this plan has been always too much treated as visionary, but that either something should be done or an immediate negative given'.<sup>2</sup> Morrison also said that Dundas had been strongly in favour of the plan before the political crisis caused by George III's attack of insanity in 1788.<sup>3</sup> The situation as regards Persia was well summed up by Dundas himself when he wrote to the Foreign Secretary, the Marquess of Carmarthen, in April 1788:

Morrison's objects are partly political, partly commercial. I can give him no encouragement to hope for any interference by the force of the East India Company in the dispute of Persia.<sup>4</sup>

During the negotiations for the Anglo-French commercial treaty and after its conclusion, Dundas took up a strong and firm stand against unnecessary concessions to the French in the East. He realized the necessity of a commercial agreement, especially one which would protect British interests in the East if the East India Company were ever dissolved or deprived of its monopoly, but he was not disposed to allow the French

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 766, Edwards, John Morrison to D., Nov. 6, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', John Morrison to Lord Grenville, Nov. 24, 1791 (précis).

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 766, Edwards, Morrison to D., Sept. 10, 1789.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to the Marquess of Carmarthen, Apr. 17, 1788 (copy).

more than they already held.<sup>1</sup> In December 1786 he would not accept as a basis of negotiation an informal agreement which had been drawn up at the island of Mauritius between the British and French.<sup>2</sup> In fact, he was rather sorry that agents of the Indian Government had been allowed to negotiate informally at Mauritius. The concessions which they appeared willing to grant as regards 'right of search' were particularly displeasing to him. In March 1787 Dundas wrote to Sir William Eden (Lord Auckland) his views of the newly made treaty and its application to the East.<sup>3</sup> He wished the thirteenth article of the treaty to be 'construed and admitted to import that the right to be enjoyed by the French traders should be a freedom co-extensive with the right of trading enjoyed by British subjects'. Such an interpretation of the article would enable the British 'either to lay prohibitions on the Imports or Exports of particular manufactures or commodities or to exercise any other rights of sovereignty in the regulation of the trade of India'.<sup>4</sup> Dundas urged Eden to warn the French Government that the language held by French agents to the Indian native powers was most offensive. After expressing an opinion that the French had no right in the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, although the island was probably useless to the British, Dundas wrote to Eden in April:

... When they [the French] talk any swaggering language upon that or any other subject, you are perfectly aware of the necessity of talking to them in a similar style, and I am more and more convinced every day that we shall soon feel ourselves in a situation in India that will cause all nations to think well before they disturb us. It's our duty and

<sup>1</sup> See Hist. MSS. Comm., 13th Rept., App. III, Dropmore MSS., i. 268, D. to Grenville, Sept. 27, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Lt.-Col. Cathcart, Dec. 15, 1786 (copy). Cathcart probably was the agent authorized to act at Mauritius, with approval of the East India Company.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to the Rt. Hon. Wm. Eden, Mar. 1787 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

interest at the same time to do their fair pretensions ample justice, so as to deprive them of any fair grounds of complaint.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas's estimate of the French treaty as a whole is to be found in a letter to Sir Archibald Campbell of March 23, 1787, where he wrote:

. . . You must not be sick, we cannot afford it ; we feel that in the possession of Lord Cornwallis and you at your respective situations, our prosperity in India is almost restored . . . Our public situation continues equally strong, rather stronger than when you left us. The Session of Parliament has proceeded triumphantly. In former sessions, Mr. Pitt, from taxes and other things not of a popular nature, was obliged at times to struggle against many difficulties, but the measures of this session have been the Commercial Treaty with France and the Consolidation of the Customs : the First, the greatest boon the manufacturers ever received: the last, the great and longed for ease of the merchant.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Dundas liked to think that the increased prosperity of India was in some part due to his ability in commercial matters. In April 1788 he wrote to the Hon. Charles Stuart that 'if the present system of Indian Government has any particular merit in it, it is on account of so much more attention being paid to India's true commercial interests than ever was before the acquisition of the Dewannee'.<sup>3</sup> Dundas was especially solicitous about the development of the China trade. In 1786 he plied his nephew—Philip Dundas—at Bombay with questions about the China market, as well as about the Persian and Arabian markets.<sup>4</sup> In the same year George Smith wrote to Dundas at length of his visit to Canton. Smith had previously suggested the appointment of a permanent British consul at Canton and the conclusion of an alliance with the Chinese to defend them against any hostile attempts from Russia.<sup>5</sup> Smith proceeded to Canton, touching

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to the Rt. Hon. Wm. Eden, April 6, 1787 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Sir A. Campbell, Mar. 23, 1787 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Chas. Stuart, Apr. 6, 1788 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, memorandum of D. to Philip Dundas, Dec. 1786 (copy).

<sup>5</sup> I.O., Home Misc., 434, Geo. Smith to D., Apr. 15, 1786.



at the newly acquired island of Pulo Penang, which he described as of great commercial and political value. Arriving in Canton late in the year 1786, he reported that the Company's affairs in Canton had been much improved by a seasonal supply of money from England. He discussed the importance of developing private trade between India and China, and negotiated for the purchase of tea in large quantities in return for bills on Bengal. According to Smith, the Chinese trusted the English, but opened and measured every French or Dutch bale.<sup>1</sup> In 1787 Dundas wrote to Eden that, while Britain had no right to complain of French interference in Indo-China, he 'certainly should not like to see them get an establishment there, for it could only be with the *avowed* intention of getting advantage over us in the China Trade or the secret purpose of obtaining in that quarter of the world additional political strength to enable them to annoy us'.<sup>2</sup>

It must not be thought that Dundas, even before 1790, had not realized that the pursuit of the 'true commercial interests' of India would necessitate a more aggressive Indian foreign policy than had been intended by Pitt's India Act of 1784. Nevertheless, he seems still to have hoped that it would be possible to continue a peace policy in India. In 1789 he had not yet quite made up his mind that wars of conquest, political alliances, and increased acquisitions of Indian territory were immediately necessary and desirable. We may well leave this discussion of India affairs during the first years under the Board of Control by quoting from Dundas's letter of April 7, 1789 to Colonel Ross, Lord Cornwallis's secretary. In reply to a letter from Ross describing in detail the social and political conditions in Bengal, Dundas wrote:

. . . All these minutiae are essential to be known and

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Geo. Smith to D., Nov. 26, 1786 (précis). See also letter of Dec. 12, 1786, where Smith reports that the Portuguese Governor of Macao is oppressive to the English.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Sir Wm. Eden, Apr. 6, 1787 (copy).

attended to by any person who means to view our Indian Empire with a statesman's eye. I have many speculations in my mind upon the subject, but they must be progressive, and it is no unpleasant prospect to look to the present state of our Indian possessions which enables us to hope that in the continuance of peace and prosperity we can indulge speculations of future aggrandisement far beyond the moment in which we now act.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the beginning of the impeachment proceedings against Hastings, Dundas's activities as a political manager, and especially his work of forming a party at the India House in the 'interest' of the Board of Control, brought much censure upon Pitt's Government. In March 1788, the Marquess of Buckingham wrote to his brother, Lord Grenville, from Dublin:

. . . I find in this country that the extent of the push against Mr. Pitt is very widely spread and it is attributed *solely* to Mr. Dundas. You know that in this I only repeat, and do not mean to give jealousy; but this is the universal language here, and it is pointed to his want of judgment, to his jobs, and to the discontent which he has given in the India House. . . . I would not have mentioned this if I had not heard it from several quarters.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in London, Dundas and Pitt were able to rise to the occasion. Their critics pressed them very hard in the debates on the East India Declaratory Bill which affirmed the Board of Control's power over Indian revenue administration. The intensity of the opposition caught them unawares on the first debate, and Pitt's majority was reduced to fifty. After three hours on his feet defending his Indian policy, Dundas was so hoarse he could hardly speak. Pitt, no less exhausted, was unable to combat Fox. Messengers left immediately for Scotland to bring down several absent Scottish members, for Pitt and Dundas wished a 'more respectable majority'.<sup>3</sup> Even before these faithful

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Col. Alex. Ross, Apr. 7, 1789 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS., i. 309, M. of B. to Gren., Mar. 14, 1788.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., Montagu Dundas to her brother Robert, then in Paris, Mar. 16, 1788.

henchmen of Dundas's arrived, Pitt and Dundas were successful in changing ten votes to swell their total. Of this incident, Dundas's daughter Montagu said:

... They [the Opposition] thought they had given a mortal blow to the ministry, in which I believe they find themselves rather mistaken. There is no doubt of Mr. Pitt carrying the bill in the Lower House, whatever he may do in the Upper one. One would imagine from his speeches he had never had the least doubt of it, as he has all along treated them very *de haut en bas* even when they thought they had got a blow. At the same time, I believe there were doubts at the beginning. My father is so terribly hurried just now, he is scarcely ever at Wimbledon.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas himself seems to have thought that these 'rubs and struggles' had been fairly serious. Later, he wrote to Colonel Abercrombie in India that the colonel's brother, Burnet, member for Clackmannanshire, 'gave a steady and cordial support in all our late struggles'.<sup>2</sup>

No sooner had these difficulties in Parliament been successfully surmounted than Pitt and Dundas were brought to the very brink of resignation by the accident of the King's temporary attack of insanity in the winter 1788-9. To Dundas, the advent of the Prince of Wales to power would have been a bitter blow, for the Prince's friends would have stripped Dundas of all influence in national affairs and would have done their utmost to break his hold over Scotland. He momentarily expected to be compelled to retire from public life. Soon after the beginning of the illness, he wrote to Abercrombie:

... I write you this letter in a most extraordinary situation. The King has been extremely ill and although otherwise well remains disordered in his mind. It is impossible to detail matters at length, but the only remedy will be a new government formed under the Prince as Regent. I need scarcely add that in a government so formed, I will not have any share.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Col. Abercrombie, Apr. 8, 1789 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Nov. 29, 1788.

In reply to an anxious letter from his mother, who regarded 'Mr. Pitt's character as an honest man and able minister as too conspicuous to require any verdict from individuals',<sup>1</sup> Dundas wrote in January 1789:

. . . I do not wonder you feel perfectly confused at the approaching dismissal of your friends from their present situations. They never felt prouder than at the present moment, and, if they should never again return to public office, which, however, is not very probable, they will forever look back with infinite satisfaction to the present moment, when they have made so honourable and successful a struggle for the principles of the Constitution and the Honour of their Sovereign.<sup>2</sup>

Such letters have a greater ring of sincerity than those written during the political crises of 1780-3. Dundas's friendship for and loyalty to Pitt had so grown with the years that there is very little doubt that he would never have returned to political life except under Pitt.

Fortunately for Pitt and his colleagues, the King recovered his reason before the Whigs could succeed in passing the Regency Bill, and the previous months of anxiety quickly seemed but a bad dream. With this added sense of security, Dundas decided later in the year to refuse the Lord Presidency of the Scottish Court of Session, the office which had been the great goal of his ambition during his younger days, and to which he had still looked, as a haven of rest, during the difficulties and struggles of 1782-3. In 1787, on the death of his half-brother Robert, the office was probably not seriously considered by Dundas as properly within his reach, for Thomas Miller of Glenlee seems to have succeeded to it without question. On that judge's death two years later, the office was definitely offered to Dundas and was refused.<sup>3</sup> Dundas preferred to advance his good friend Ilay Campbell from the Lord Advocateship and to fill that office with his

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., his mother to D., Dec. 20, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to his mother, Jan. 3, 1789.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 35. See also Haydn's *Book of Dignities*, on the Lord Presidents.

nephew, Robert Dundas of Arniston, then the Solicitor-General. In writing to Grenville of this, Dundas simply said 'I take it for granted, nobody will be preferred to the Solicitor as Advocate'.<sup>1</sup> Both these appointments were dictated by the exigencies of Dundas's position as political manager of Scotland. He knew far better than Pitt that the political dominance towards which he was aiming in Scotland could not be achieved if he were to be compelled to devote most of his time to the Edinburgh high court. In a letter to Grenville of October 1789 he said:

. . . My secession from all political life at this time would be a very fatal step to the Strength and hold Government has of Scotland. A variety of circumstances happen to concur in my person to render me a cement of political strength to the present Administration, which, if it were dissolved, would produce very ruinous effects.<sup>2</sup>

The appointment of Robert Dundas as Lord Advocate was of course deliberately planned, so that he might be used as Dundas's chief political agent in Scotland. So well and successfully were these schemes carried out that Dundas greatly increased his political influence in Scotland at the General Election of 1790.<sup>3</sup> He was perfectly correct in his conviction that his return to the legal profession would certainly have meant chaos in Scottish politics, which in turn would have made Pitt far less able to withstand 'pushes' against his Government comparable to that of the spring of 1788, to say nothing of that of the winter of 1788-9. Of this, Pitt, himself, was acutely conscious, for he wrote that, if Dundas's friends had prevailed on him to accept the Lord Presidency, he certainly should not be much obliged to them, unless they would undertake to show him 'some way of managing the politics of either Scotland or India under such an arrangement'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 13th Rept., App. III, Dropmore MSS. i. 524, D. to Grenville, Sept. 29, 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. i. 534.

<sup>3</sup> *Infra*, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Miscellaneous, Edwards, Pitt to D. dated Hollwood, Oct. 6, 1789.

The successful campaign of 1790 together with the non-appearance of the King's insanity all but firmly assured the stability of the Pitt Government and placed Dundas upon the threshold of a wider sphere of activity. The preceding years had done much to prepare him for increased burdens of office. In Indian affairs, in Scottish political management, and in the management of the House of Commons itself, he had shown a great capacity for hard, close, and unremitting labour. He was essential to Pitt primarily because he was a politician who could command votes and make compromises, but the management of Indian affairs had enabled him to rise much above the level of the mere political manager and had given him a comprehensive view of Britain's imperial problems. Moreover, he had carved a deeper niche for himself in London 'society'. Not only had his reputation as 'good fellow' been enhanced, but much of the uncouthness of his earlier years had worn off. The newly widowed Duchess of Rutland wished to move to Wimbledon expressly because of the 'agreeable' society at Dundas's house.<sup>1</sup> By 1789, Dundas was equipped with a town house at Wimbledon, a shooting lodge in the Highlands, and a new castle outside Edinburgh at Lasswade.<sup>2</sup> He was as bluff and hearty as ever, but the eight years since 1783 had brought with them both a greater capacity for work and a poise and breadth of view which had hitherto been lacking. With his appointment as Home Secretary in June 1791, Dundas entered upon the most active and important decade of his career.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS. in possession of Lady Melville, Duchess of Rutland to D., Apr. 9, 1788. 'The vicinity of so agreeable a house as yours would be certainly one of the greatest inducements to me to fix there.'

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Fam. Alb. Melville Castle finished 1788.

### III

#### THE ATTACK ON JACOBINISM 1791-4

IN the last years of the eighteenth century the Home Secretary in the British Cabinet was expected to be a jack-of-all-trades. Not only was he responsible for local administration, but Irish and colonial affairs were also within his province. Moreover, until the creation of the post of Secretary of State for War, in July 1794,<sup>1</sup> more than a year after war had broken out between Great Britain and France, the conduct of military operations was supervised through the Home Office. Such a combination of duties, coupled with those of the Presidency of the Board of Control for India, severely strained the powers of work even of so indefatigable a worker as Dundas. In former days when he had only to attend to India and the details of parliamentary management, he had been in the habit of making annual visits to Scotland during the summer for the twofold purpose of shooting and augmenting his political influence. After 1791 these visits were either given up or cut short. The French Revolution had already begun to cast its shadow of unrest and disturbance over the British Isles. Scottish politics were, in so far as possible, turned over to the new Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas of Arniston;<sup>2</sup> Irish and colonial affairs were thrust into the background; and even India was somewhat neglected, while the new Home Secretary devoted himself to the preservation of order and tranquillity in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is some confusion, notably in Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 270-1, and in the 1851 edition of Haydn's *Book of Dignities* with regard to the control of colonial affairs on this occasion. It seems certain from the documents (v. e.g. Kennedy, W. P. M., *Docs. of the Canadian Constitution*) that colonial affairs continued under the Home Office after 1794. Haydn gives 1801 as the date of transfer to the War Office.

<sup>2</sup> Dundas's nephew and son-in-law.

<sup>3</sup> Many writers have discussed the influence of the French Revolution in England; see for example, Veitch, G. S., *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*. For Scotland, Meikle, H. W., *Scotland and the French Revolution*, remains the chief authority.

For this task of controlling 'Jacobinism' no one could have better suited the most ardent supporter of the 'established order in Church and State' than Dundas. During the previous decade he had expressed no real sympathy with those projects of reform which had evoked the sympathies of his chief and were sponsored by the more thoughtful members of the upper and middle classes who recognized the need of salutary changes in the British political and social fabric. On one of very few occasions when he, at Pitt's insistence, voted in favour of a reform motion, he said that he did so solely in the hope that the proposed measure would set the question at rest *for ever*.<sup>1</sup> The widespread reform agitation which went on outside Parliament before the outbreak of the French Revolution was completely lost upon him. He had neither the time nor the inclination to pay any attention to it. Any project for change in the political system of Scotland on which his dictatorship rested was anathema. It was perhaps solely due to the zeal of Sheridan that attempts to reform the Scottish burghs and counties persisted into the Revolutionary era.<sup>2</sup> In 1789 Dundas had all but given that well-considered<sup>3</sup> movement its quietus by a stinging speech in which he said the remedy for corruption was in the courts, and added: 'The fact indeed is that the abuses are merely imaginary, and the Scottish nation does not feel them to exist.'<sup>4</sup>

Such sentiments as these were immeasurably strengthened in Dundas's mind after the dissemination of the ideas set forth in the *Declaration of Rights of Man* and in the writings of Thomas Paine had greatly increased the number of 'associations' and 'corresponding

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Sheridan's last Bill for burgh reform was defeated in 1792. On this occasion he made a rather tactless speech; see *Parl. Hist.*, xxix. 1183 ff., and Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 76. In 1793 Dundas and his nephew put an end to the last vestiges of the movement for the reform of the Scottish counties. See Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Fifty-three burghs were favourable to reform in 1788 as against forty-seven in 1785. See also Kennedy, Wm., *Annals of Aberdeen* (published 1818), p. 317, for statistics on the reform agitation.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, Wm., *Annals of Aberdeen*, pp. 326-7.



societies' of 'Friends of the People' in Great Britain. Indeed, with the increase of violence in France and the formulation by the British radicals of plans which seemed impossible of fulfilment save through civil war, the bulk of the British 'governing class', even those among them who had formerly espoused the cause of reform, rallied to the support of a policy of repression. Within the short space of three years, the growth of a very real dread of 'Jacobinism' led to the use by the Government of *agents provocateurs*, of secret service funds to subsidize press and pulpit, of 'packed juries', and of judges who would sentence troublesome agitators to be transported to the new penal colony at Botany Bay.

The troubles of the year 1791 were but a prelude to the violent awakening of the revolutionary spirit in 1792. In the former year, Dundas was not only importuned to appoint clergymen on account of their 'love of order and interest in His Majesty's peaceable government',<sup>1</sup> but he was obliged to deal with violence resulting from too great zeal among the *partisans* of Church and King. About a month after Dundas became Home Secretary, riots broke out in Birmingham against Dr. Priestley and his Nonconformist followers. On this occasion, Dundas acted with vigour and precision by dispatching troops from Nottingham as soon as the news of the disturbance reached him on July 15, 1791.<sup>2</sup> In this year, Dundas was also confronted with the unpleasant duty of enforcing in Scotland the Corn Bill of 1791 for encouraging the exportation and restraining the importation of wheat.<sup>3</sup> He had taken no part in the framing or passing of this act, but he incurred all the odium of administering it.<sup>4</sup>

The violent outbreak of the revolutionary spirit during 1792 resulted chiefly from three causes: the activity of Thomas Hardy's new 'London Corresponding Society' and of other 'associations' of 'Friends of the People' in January; the publication of the second

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.4, Earl of Hopetoun to D., Sept. 12, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

part of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* in February; and the opening of war between France and Austria in April. Early in January, Dundas's nephew was engaged in the trial of a member of a Society of 'Friends of the People', and Dundas was urged to speed a conviction in order to quell the movement.<sup>1</sup> Before April, the Government had already begun the policy of subsidizing newspapers. On April 14 Henry Mackenzie, the author of *The Man of Feeling*, wrote to Dundas's nephew of the necessity of continuing the subsidies for the *Edinburgh Herald*. 'It is', he said, 'the only newspaper now in Scotland sincerely and truly well affected to the Government'.<sup>2</sup> On the declaration of war in Europe, Pitt opposed a notice of a motion for political reform for the following session of Parliament. After April 30, the gulf between the Prime Minister and the advocates of moderate reform had become impassable.<sup>3</sup>

The situation in Scotland at the beginning of May was well summed up by Dundas's friend and appointee William Honeyman. When he reported to Dundas the attack on the Provost of Lanark, who was twice fired upon, he ascribed it to 'an almost universal spirit of reform and opposition to the established government and legal administration which has wonderfully diffused through the manufacturing towns of this country, and is openly patronized by many gentlemen of fortune'.<sup>4</sup> Dundas was then already convinced that a stringent proclamation against 'seditious writings' should be issued. On May 9 he wrote the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow, of this plan.<sup>5</sup> In his letter he assured Lord Thurlow that he had received an

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, John Pringle to D., Jan. 7, 1792, transmitting a report of the proceedings of the 'friends of the people'. He advises against the conviction of a certain Tytler. Later, he wrote that Tytler had fled the country and warrant of 'fugitation' had been issued for his apprehension.

<sup>2</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr. ii. 500, H. Mackenzie to R. D., Apr. 14, 1792. Quoted in Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 24-5.

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, Will Honeyman to D., May 8, 1792. Quoted in Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 748, N. L. S., D. to the Lord Chancellor, May 9, 1792 (original).

offer of cordial co-operation from the chief members of the Opposition, and enclosed a draft of a proclamation and of an Act for the better control of immigration. He proposed that the proclamation should lay stress on 'the immense influx of foreigners and the suspicious conduct of many of them'.<sup>1</sup> In conclusion, Dundas wrote:

. . . Whatever is right to be done ought to be done quickly, and above all, we must avoid impressing those who have on public grounds proffered their aid that His Majesty's Government is backward and tardy in taking such steps as may be thought necessary for repressing those pernicious practices and doctrines which are afloat and which cannot be met and resisted at too early a stage.<sup>2</sup>

Twelve days later, Pitt issued the proclamation. It enjoined 'a due submission to the laws and a just confidence in the integrity and wisdom of Parliament'.<sup>3</sup> In defending it against the attacks of the more liberal-minded members of the House, Dundas pleaded that the Government had been forced to take action by the recent writings of Thomas Paine and by the founding of clubs to carry out Paine's ideas.<sup>4</sup>

In Edinburgh, the proclamation was viewed by some in a facetious spirit. The following is a sample of a handbill distributed there late in May 1792 and duly transmitted to Dundas by his ever-watchful nephew:

In contempt of his Majesty's most gracious proclamation against Riot, Sedition, Republicanism, Profanity, Rights of Man, etc.; in contempt of the Records of Star Chamber; in contempt of the Scots Privy Council and the gracious commands of Lauderdale therein Recorded, it is strongly reported that on the King's Birthday, Anno 1792, an atheistical, Deistical, Jesuitical, Presbyterian, Dissenting Rabble are unlawfully to assemble at the Cross of Edinburgh, and then and there, to burn in Effigy the President of the National Assembly of the French, the effigy of Mr. Tycat of fighting character, the effigy of the Marquis of Roccambol, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 25 ff.

effigy's of sundry other traitors. The said Rabble are to be dressed in Grand Gala, representing in most lively Colors even superior to the best waxwork: the King and Queen of France, Princes, Marquisses, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, etc. according to the order of Precedence in the Court Calander of the late court of Versailles. When the effigy's are reduced to dust and ashes, Then, in triumph over Jenny Geddes of stool casting memory, the said Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, etc. are to repair to the Cathedral of St. Giles, where they are to Celebrate High Mass and sing Te Deum. The night to conclude with Bells, Squibs, Crackers, Bonfires, and Claret.<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, nothing facetious about the actual celebration of the King's birthday in June. The riots which then broke out in Edinburgh and elsewhere were serious and prolonged. In Edinburgh, the houses of Dundas's nephew, the Lord Advocate, and of the Lord Provost were attacked and stoned.<sup>2</sup> Dundas's aged mother was annoyed by a mob which surrounded the house.<sup>3</sup> Effigies of Dundas were burned in Aberdeen, Perth, Dundee, and many other Scottish towns. Anonymous letters of a scurrilous character were sent to him at the Home Office. The following, written on the day after the King's birthday, is an interesting example:

Mr. Hery Dundas

Sir,

I am exceedingly happy to inform you that your effeigee's mett with the Just fate you yourself deserves and woud have gott, had you dared to have ventured here. I mean that several of them were publickly burned to the great Joy of all lovers of there country and indeed of almost every individual

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, 'Handbill published at Edinburgh May 1792'. Printed in Meikle, H. W., 'King's Birthday Riot in Edinburgh', *Scottish Historical Review*, vii. 21-8. Rochambeau had just been defeated by the Austrians and had resigned his command. It was popularly believed that a woman named Jenny Geddes had created a riot in St. Giles's when Charles I tried to force episcopacy on Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb. On June 9, 1792, Dundas wrote his mother that he was grieved that her repose should have been disturbed by riots against him and was sorry he could not have been with her.

in Scotland, and I do advise you not to be seen here if you wish long life.

You may inform Mr. Pitt and the d—d Idiot of a king that I wrote this by the order of the Committee of Revolutioners in Scotland. You may inform them there will be Hott work for them.

Amane

Patriotticus<sup>1</sup>

Although the Lord Provost of Edinburgh minimized the disturbances of June in his letters to Dundas, he was nevertheless obliged to use troops in order to quell them.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the repressive measures taken by Dundas and his nephew, the agitation continued during the summer, especially in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Late in July, a scarcity of food together with the enclosure of Highland land for sheep-farming brought the discontent in Scotland to fever heat. On July 31, the situation in Ross-shire was reported to Dundas and his nephew as desperate. The chairman of a county meeting of freeholders then wrote:

. . . The Sheriff will explain to your lordship [Robert Dundas] that we are at present so completely under the heel of the populace that, should they come to burn our houses or destroy our property in any way their caprice may lead them to, we are incapable of resistance.<sup>4</sup>

This gentleman intimated that five hundred infantry and two or three troops of cavalry would be needed to restore order. These demands were strongly endorsed by Robert Dundas.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Dundas ordered Lord Adam Gordon, Commander-in-Chief for Scotland, to leave Edinburgh for the North, and held

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5. Endorsed with date June 5, 1792. Also printed in Meikle, *loc. cit.* The Home Office archives contain much correspondence on the Scottish unrest of 1792. This has been discussed thoroughly in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, J. Stirling to D., June 5, 1792; the same to the same, June 20, 1792.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Robert Dundas to Hepburn, July 9, 1792. 'We have had riots and tumults in Berwickshire and they have burned, it seems, all the toll bars in the county.'

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, Hugh Monro to R. D., July 31, 1792 (enclosed to D.).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., Aug. 6, 1792.

troops in England in readiness to be sent to Edinburgh if necessary.<sup>1</sup> Within a few weeks the disturbances had subsided. This speedy restoration of order was probably due, in large part, to the tact and forbearance of Lord Adam Gordon, who wrote to Dundas that he was of a decided opinion 'that no *disloyalty* or spirit of *rebellion* or dislike to His Majesty's person or government—is in the least degree concerned in these tumults—and that they have solely originated in a too well-founded apprehension' that proprietors were to enclose their estates for sheep-farming.<sup>2</sup> In August Dundas had already begun the practice of employing *agents provocateurs* to spy upon revolutionary associations and report to him directly. The report of Robert Watt, dated August 31, claimed that the Scottish revolutionary societies secured membership by house to house canvassing. He described their meetings as attempting to copy exactly the proceedings of the French political clubs. The members of one society had tried to persuade him to join by lending him Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, Mackintosh's *Answer to Burke*, and Flower's *Publications*. In conclusion Dundas was warned to advise his mother not to go to Edinburgh bookshops 'to inquire after seditious books'. It appears that that lady, now in her eighty-seventh year, had been visiting the bookstalls and making tart comments upon the seditious literature which she found there.<sup>3</sup>

Dundas's visit to Scotland in the autumn of 1792 was the occasion for a renewal of trouble in Edinburgh. The personal courage with which he met the attacks upon him played a large part in causing the more violent spirits to desist from their schemes. Although he had been warned of a plot to assassinate him,<sup>4</sup> Dundas came to Edinburgh early in October, taking up residence as usual at Melville Castle. He

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102. 5, draft of order to Lord Adam Gordon, dated Aug. 9, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Lord Adam Gordon to D., Aug. 19, 1792, quoted in Meikle, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Robert Watt to D., long report dated North Gray's Close, Edin., Aug. 31, 1792. Also quoted in Meikle, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Robert Ross to D., Oct. 1, 1792.

had not been there four days before he was convinced that the unrest in Scotland was far more widespread than he had hitherto realized. He then wrote to his under-secretary at the Home Office:

Melville Castle, Oct. 14, 1792

Dear Nepean,

I send you a letter I received this morning from a friend of mine. The gentleman, who writes from Glasgow, is a very respectable man. Show it to Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville and keep it among your other papers. I am more and more satisfied that unless something effectual can be done by Parliament to check the indiscriminate practice of association, they will spread the fermentation of the country to such a height that it will be impossible to restrain the effects of them. They stop at nothing. It would appear that they either wished to murder myself or to burn my house, for I was not two days arrived before notification of it was given in a very suspicious mode. Some boys were detected at midnight putting up billets of the enclosed tenor [enclosed is a dirty slip of gummed paper: 'Mr. D., member of Parliament for Edinr. is at Melville Castle Oct. 12, 1792'] on the corners of the different streets of Edinburgh, which one of the magistrates brought to me in great alarm. I told him that if they really were determined on personal mischief, no precaution could prevent it; that I was determined to use none, but to do exactly in every respect as I used to do.

Yours sincerely,  
Henry Dundas.<sup>1</sup>

This determination to pursue the even tenor of his way had its effect, for no violent outbreak against him took place. A month later, he wrote to Pitt that he must stay in Scotland some time longer in order to carry out a plan of subsidizing small publications.<sup>2</sup> It was even suggested to him at this time that he should sting the Scots into loyalty 'by employing an able pen such as that of a Dean Swift to write a libel against the Scotch, asserting that their present commotions originate from the old spirit of rebellion still lurking

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Nepean, Oct. 14, 1792 (orig.).

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS., 157, D. to Pitt, Nov. 12, 1792 (copy).

amongst them from their detestation of the English Constitution, their rooted hatred of the established episcopal religion, and their anxious desire to exchange their barren country and oatmeal for the rich soil, roast beef, and plum pudding of Old England'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Dundas was so importuned on all sides by the Scottish officials and so depended upon to keep order that he could hardly get away to London for the next session of Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

In December 1792 the activities of associations of 'Friends of the People' increased in spite of all Dundas's efforts to quell them by spreading 'sound doctrines' through press and pulpit. There then met in Scotland a general convention of delegates from societies of 'Friends of the People'.<sup>3</sup> Although the proceedings of this gathering were quite orderly, Robert Dundas appears to have considered such a general meeting indicative of a very alarming combination of seditious associations.<sup>4</sup> On January 2, 1793, Thomas Muir, vice-president of a society of 'Friends of the People', was arrested and brought before the Deputy-Sheriff of Midlothian.<sup>5</sup> His was perhaps the most famous of those trials for sedition which occurred during the years 1793 and 1794. There is no denying the fact that the jury was 'packed' and that the judge, Robert Macqueen, Lord Braxfield, displayed violence and political bias which were a disgrace to the bench, but, on the other hand, it is equally certain Muir's conduct had been extremely provocative. As Pitt's most recent biographer has well said: 'It was his [Muir's] visit to Paris and his dealings with the United Irishmen, far more than biassed witnesses and the bullying of Braxfield which led to the condemnation of this talented youth'.<sup>6</sup> Even Robert Dundas himself may have de-

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.6, Anonymous soldier to D., Nov. 9, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 61, D. to Nepean, 'If I was to give way to the importunity and anxiety of those who wish to retain my assistance here, I should never get away.' Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 173-6. Minutes of the meeting are printed in Meikle, *op. cit.*, Appendix, pp. 239-73.

<sup>4</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 173-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



precatcd the sentence of transportation for fourteen years. In his letter to his uncle of October 15, 1793, he seems to have regarded the sentences of Muir and of Palmer, who had been sentenced to five years' transportation for writing a seditious libel, as justified solely on the ground that they constituted a salutary warning to the members of associations of 'Friends of the People'.<sup>1</sup> He had had Palmer convicted even though it was brought out at the trial that Palmer himself had not written the libellous placard but had toned down and edited a draft of it written by a certain Mealmaker.<sup>2</sup> It appears clear that if the practice of 'association' had markedly subsided either then or later, Robert Dundas would not have been averse to the mitigation of these sentences, for he then wrote to Dundas:

. . . I need hardly say more than refer to the enclosed note from Warrender which very shortly states the objections to any mitigation of the punishments of Palmer and Muir *at present*. [*Italics Robert Dundas's.*]<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the letter, he takes his stand only on the basis of the reports of increased revolutionary activity sent in by his 'spy', 'J. B.', together with anonymous threats of assassination. Dundas fully supported his nephew. When, as a result of the criticism of the trial, in Parliament, Lauderdale, Grey, and Sheridan called on him and pointed out that verbal sedition was punishable in Scots law only by banishment, Dundas referred the whole question back to the judges. He wrote to Robert Dundas on November 16 that if the judges defended their sentence 'scientifically' he would carry it into execution and 'meet the clamour in Parliament without any kind of dismay'.<sup>4</sup> The judges did so, and, ultimately, the sentences were carried out.

Two other cases in which Dundas was chiefly con-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Oct. 15, 1793.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, R. D. to D., Oct. 15, 1793.

<sup>4</sup> Omond, G. W. T., *Arniston Memoirs*, pp. 239-40.

cerned in 1794 were those of Skirving, Margarot, and Gerrald, and of Watt. Skirving, Margarot, and Gerrald were arrested as a result of the intense activity of the revolutionary societies in the autumn of 1793 in the midst of the campaign for the mitigation of the sentences against Palmer and Muir. In November, there sat in Edinburgh a convention representing over forty associations in England and Scotland. Robert Dundas naturally kept a watchful eye on this gathering and wrote to Dundas on November 30:

. . . The Solicitor and I attend to their proceedings and I hope they will not break up these meetings without doing something which will entitle us to interfere.<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, their debates attained an almost Parisian vehemence, which gave Robert Dundas the opportunity to arrest the leaders, Sinclair, Skirving, Margarot, and Gerrald. Sinclair turned informer and was not indicted.<sup>2</sup> The trial of the other three was characterized by Lord Braxfield's extraordinary declaration that the crime of sedition consisted 'in endeavouring to create a dissatisfaction in the country, which nobody can tell where it will end. It will very naturally end in overt rebellion; if it has that tendency, though not in the mind of the parties at the time, yet if they have been guilty of poisoning the minds of the lieges, I apprehend that that will constitute the crime of sedition to all intents and purposes'.<sup>3</sup> Such legal reasoning harked back to the days of Judge Jeffreys a century before. Margarot was a vain hot-headed person, but Gerrald was an Englishman of refined character, who gave Lord Braxfield no excuse for insulting him. Before the trial, Gerrald told William Scot, one of Dundas's agents, that 'he knew his sentence by the Court here [Edinburgh] was fixed by *instructions* from the *Great Man* above, Dundas, but his mind was

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Nov. 30, 1793. *Re* societies represented, see Meikle, *op. cit.*, App., pp. 274-5.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 183, quoted from *State Trials*, xxiii. 766.

made up to it'.<sup>1</sup> That Dundas sent any specific instructions regarding Gerrald is extremely unlikely, for Robert Dundas's letter to his uncle dated two days later appears to give Dundas for the first time detailed knowledge on Gerrald. It described his activities in the Edinburgh meetings and said he would be tried on March 3, 1794. Robert Dundas also reported Gerrald as declaring that the French would overrun England before the sentences against Muir and Palmer could be carried out.<sup>2</sup> In due time, sentences of transportation for long periods were passed upon Skirving, Margarot, and Gerrald.<sup>3</sup>

The case of Watt is of interest because he had previously acted as a Government informer. During the months of September, October, November, and December 1792, he reported directly to Dundas. From that time forward his correspondence was taken over by Robert Dundas.<sup>4</sup> He apparently ceased to be employed by the Government after July 1793.<sup>5</sup> About a year later, shortly before Dundas left the Home Office to the Duke of Portland, Watt was arrested. Together with a man named Downie, he was tried and convicted in September 1794.<sup>6</sup> In view of these facts, there is a possibility that Dundas and his nephew were guilty of abandoning their own spy and of doing nothing to stay his conviction. No definite conclusion on this point is possible unless more evidence is brought to light. What little evidence there is is distinctly in favour of Dundas and his nephew. In the first place, there is good evidence that Watt was not employed as a spy after July 1793.<sup>7</sup> In the second, Robert Dundas on June 21, 1794, wrote to his uncle that he wished to arrange that the Lord President or the Lord Chief Baron should preside over the trials of Watt and Downie

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, Wm. Scot to D., Feb. 16, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., Feb. 18, 1794.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 61. Craik, *A Century of Scottish History*, ii. 155.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, R. D. to D., Aug. 26, 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, R. D. to D., Sept. 4, 1794.

<sup>7</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

instead of Lord Braxfield, 'a violent and intemperate gentleman'.<sup>1</sup> To this Dundas readily agreed, and the trial, when it came on, was far fairer than those conducted by Braxfield.<sup>2</sup> This correspondence is refreshing reading because it shows that Dundas and his nephew had, themselves, become disgusted with Braxfield's brutalities. In the third place, Dundas and his nephew seem sincerely to have been convinced that Watt had really engaged in seditious conspiracy and had espoused the principles of those whom he had been sent to spy upon. Dundas told Pitt in March 1794 that spearheads had been collected and were, together with other weapons, secreted in Watt's house.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the trial, Robert Dundas was apparently surprised at the conclusiveness of the evidence which had piled up against Watt and Downie. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty after being out less than an hour. Robert Dundas then wrote: 'We have the public voice completely with us. Nobody believed the plan was so serious as we proved it.'<sup>4</sup> The only evidence that Robert Dundas tried to protect himself and his uncle lies in his thwarting of an attempt by Watt to call Dundas as a witness.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, such evidence on this case as has yet been brought forward does *not* lead to the conclusion that Dundas and his nephew basely betrayed one of their own *agents provocateurs*. Downie was subsequently reprieved, but Watt was executed at Edinburgh, October 16, 1794.<sup>6</sup>

During his last months at the Home Office, before he finally consented in July 1794 to turn over the office to the Duke of Portland, Dundas did not have marked success in checking the revolutionary spirit. Violence comparable to that of 1792 did not reappear, but the associations of 'Friends of the People' continued their work. Dundas and his nephew continued to receive vivid reports of these meetings from the spy 'J. B.' In

<sup>1</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Sept. 9, 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, R. D. to D., Aug. 26, 1794.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, P. A., *The French Revolution in England*, p. 125.

February 1794, 'J. B.' sent a *verbatim* report of a speech delivered at a meeting of eight of the most radical 'citizens' gathered at 'Mrs. Mason's' on a Saturday evening. The orator of the group spoke as follows:

. . . I will commence a correspondence; if I be condemned, Fellow-Citizens, I will *speak out*. I have commenced a correspondence with a great nation who will not allow me to be sent to Botany Bay!—In the name of Mutius Scaevola, Decius, and Clodius, give me six determined fellows who shall be nameless. Give me only six whom I can confide in with daggers apiece, and the business is done!!! Two here, three in London, and one in Dublin. Nothing is easier than access to the Chambers of the Aristocrats, when they are joyous over their cups, surfeiting and intoxicating at the expense of the blood and treasure of millions of British and Frenchmen—nothing is easier than access to them—and thus—and thus—and thus!!! [gives three dagger thrusts]—the death of such villains alarms the whole country. The *sans culottes* gather and the business is done.—<sup>1</sup>

On this occasion, the spy ingratiated himself with the company by describing Dundas 'as a much more *respectable* and a much more consistent character than Edmund Burke, William Pitt, and the Duke of Richmond who had formerly bawled so loud for liberty and at last had deserted it'.<sup>2</sup> In reporting this and another similar gathering called to arrange for co-operation with the London societies, the spy emphasized the care with which the more moderate in the groups pleaded that nothing overtly seditious should be attempted at that time.<sup>3</sup> The knowledge that spies were used naturally led to Dundas's being solicited by all sorts of persons who wished to sell their pens or services in the interest of the Government. One of the most eloquent of these was William Slater of Liverpool, '27 years of age and in the scholastic line', who wrote:

. . . I am proud to say without incurring the censure of arrogancy that *few* have acquired such *general* knowledge as

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., 'J. B.' to the Lord Advocate, R. D., Feb. 9, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Feb. 11, 1794.

myself. In several languages and most of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, my public *weekly lectures* are demonstrative, which is testified by the unbounded plaudits of the first characters of this town. . . .

Permit me to add that repeated bribes have been offered me from *opulent Jacobins* only to be *silent*, but, thank Heaven and my own integrity that (tho' poor) such base attempts have *in toto* been ineffectual, and the loss of such favours has been to me a cause of loyal triumph and my Pen, my Tongue, and whole deportment proved me worthy of the dignified appellation 'A disinterested lover of my King and Country'. Let me with all humility entreat your powerful interest in my behalf.<sup>1</sup>

To combat the radical associations, Dundas naturally continued the policy of subsidizing press and pulpit in 1793 and 1794. In the winter of 1792-3 the *Caledonian Mercury* was paid £134 for a 'variety of articles'.<sup>2</sup> The *Edinburgh Herald's* yearly allowance in 1794 was £100.<sup>3</sup> A man named Brown, of Dundee, who had written the pamphlet, *Look before ye Loup, by Tam Thrum, an Auld Weaver*, was set up as editor of a Government newspaper in Edinburgh, called the *Patriot's Weekly Chronicle*.<sup>4</sup> Press was regarded as more important than pulpit, for Robert Dundas, in his rough estimate of expenses submitted to his uncle in April 1794, figured that no payments except to newspapers would be needed after the spring of 1795.<sup>5</sup> The clergy had been assiduously cultivated during the previous years. Dundas was especially careful of the Scottish Episcopalian and Roman Catholic churches. Bills were passed in 1792 and 1793 relieving both of these of the religious disabilities under which they lay. Roman Catholic priests and seminaries received money from the secret service fund.<sup>6</sup> Of the many ministers who were used

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 750, N.L.S., Wm. Slater to D., May 8, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr. ii. 500. Memorandum of R. D. for D., dated Apr. 1794. Meikle, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17. <sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 62. Also Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr. ii. 500. Memorandum above cited.

<sup>6</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 62. P.R.O., H.O. 102.5 contains vote of thanks to D. for supporting application of Scotch Episcopal Church for relief, dated Aberdeen, July 14, 1792. Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

by the Government, Young of Hawick, who received a Doctorate of Divinity from the University of Aberdeen, was perhaps best known. Some years later in supporting a recommendation of Young's son for a surgeoncy in the Navy, Dundas said of Young: 'He has done more for the cause of order and government by his writings in Scotland than almost anybody'.<sup>1</sup> By no means all of the clergy in Scotland or in England were loyal. Dundas and his nephew were especially suspicious of the ministers of the dissenting sects.<sup>2</sup> In Scotland a clergyman designated as 'Mr. H.' was paid to travel about the country and report on clerical 'disaffection'.<sup>3</sup>

In Ireland, on the other hand, 'clerical disaffection' was not one of the problems which confronted the Home Secretary. It is a strange phenomenon of these years that that part of the King's dominions which was ordinarily the most troubled should have been the most quiet. The French Revolution, which caused such outbursts of political agitation in England, virtually did not affect Catholic Ireland, whose priests were estranged by the increasingly anti-Catholic character of the Revolution. The only serious murmurs of unrest therefore came from Ulster, where Wolfe Tone had organized the Society of United Irishmen in 1791. In order to defeat these and other revolutionary movements in the North, Dundas and Pitt took up the question of granting the franchise to the Irish Catholics. Although the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Westmorland, wrote that they had as much chance of passing a franchise measure in the Irish Parliament as they would have of passing a Bill abolishing slavery or reforming representation in the English Parliament, Pitt and Dundas persisted in the effort.<sup>4</sup> Finally they succeeded in persuading the reactionary Irish Protestant

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 730, N.L.S. Letter-book, 1797. D.'s instructions for reply to R. D. to D. of July 26, 1797.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Oct. 10, 1794.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 730, N.L.S., contains his appeals for back pay. Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr. ii. 500. Memorandum R. D. to D. of April 1794 allots him £50.

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

leaders of the necessity of granting the franchise. In 1793 the Bill was passed.<sup>1</sup> It was unfortunate that the good effects of this action were neutralized in 1795 by the ill-feeling created by Pitt's recall of Lord Fitzwilliam, a Whig nobleman, recently appointed Lord Lieutenant, of whom high hopes had been entertained.<sup>2</sup> Much of the responsibility for this lies on the King, and Dundas does not seem to have been concerned in the affair in any decisive way.<sup>3</sup> Even after he ceased to be Home Secretary, Dundas was appealed to by representatives of the Irish Catholics and had regretfully to refuse them a hearing because their business was not in his department.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously Dundas cannot escape criticism for his conduct as a persecutor of Jacobinism when Home Secretary. In the light of subsequent events, and in the light of modern condemnation of *agents provocateurs*, 'packed' juries, callous judges, and subsidized press, his actions seem unduly harsh. Possibly they were unduly harsh, but we, at a distance of a century and a quarter from those eventful years, have no means of knowing precisely what degree of severity would have sufficed. Any hostile criticism of him must be tempered with a realization that his actions were approved and abetted by Burke, Pitt, and many other thoughtful men who had in times past held more liberal views than he. These men were faced with a serious crisis. They saw the organized government and social system of a neighbouring nation overthrown by the activities of political clubs which in the beginning were not essentially different from those then spreading in Great Britain. Secure in their conviction that the political

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 40. See also Hist. MSS. Comm., 14th Rept., App. V, Dropmore MSS. ii. 215, Grenville to D., Oct. 24, 1791; Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' Index Book, D. to Ld. Thurlow, Dec. 27, 1791, and reply; Mel. MSS., Burke Corr., N.L.S., Richard Burke to D., May 14, 1792 (orig.).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Ld. Hobart to D., Sept. 29, 1793. According to Lord H. the Ld. Licut.'s secretary, the Act of 1793 brought Ireland from a 'very critical' to an 'uncommonly promising' situation.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 339-44.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 750, N.L.S., Edward Byrne, John Keogh, John Hussey to D., Mar. 14, 1795, and reply (copy).



and constitutional system of Britain was immeasurably superior to that of France under the *ancien régime*, they saw no excuse for a similar overturn on their side of the Channel. They could not look into the future and see that they had overestimated the danger, and that public opinion would in the end look with disfavour on the extreme measures taken against the agitators whom they tried. Condemnation of Pitt for not pushing through moderate reform measures in the years 1788-90 may be somewhat unsparing,<sup>1</sup> but stern condemnation of him for enunciating a policy of 'no reform' in 1792 is uncalled for. Similarly, Dundas may be far more severely criticized for turning a deaf ear to all the moderate reform projects of the 1780's than for anything that he did in repressing the British Jacobins.

Even though his actions during the troubled years of the Revolutionary era gained him the reputation of being the arch-conservative of his time, he was not the worst type of reactionary. A cruel and self-seeking politician who had no conceptions of public duty would have yielded to the clamour of the most fanatical anti-Jacobins. Dundas did nothing of the sort. He preserved his common sense and kept his head. Vindictive Scottish noblemen like Lord Kellie, who urged him to pack off more 'miscreants' to Botany Bay, can hardly have received his sympathy.<sup>2</sup> Lord Cockburn, who could remember the days of Dundas's sway in Scotland, acknowledges the moderation and judgement with which he attempted to curb Braxfield's brutalities.<sup>3</sup> As Cockburn quite justly observes, the Government could have multiplied convictions for sedition to almost any extent had it chosen to do so.<sup>4</sup> Though it was thought fit in a happier age to erect a monument on Calton Hill in Edinburgh to Muir, Palmer, Gerrald, Margarot, and Skirving only ten years after Dundas's own monument in St. Andrew Square was completed,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 26-8.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Ld. Kellie to R. D. and D., Sept. 8, 1794.

<sup>3</sup> Cockburn, H., *Examination of Trials for Sedition in Scotland*, i. 90-1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

it does not necessarily follow that either shaft was undeserved. Like many others of his contemporaries, Dundas firmly believed that the measures which he took were justified in the best interests of the country. In his own words, written some years later, when he was worn out from anxiety and lack of sleep, his devotion to the public service is best expressed: 'Let happen what will to myself personally, I have the heartfelt satisfaction to know that I have been the main instrument of completely rousing the spirit and zeal of the country, and I trust, in a little more time, to have put it in a state of impregnable security.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Meikle, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

#### IV

### THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR WITH FRANCE 1793-1801

**I**N the first week of February 1793, the British Government learned that the French Convention, fired by Danton's great challenge, 'Let us fling to the Kings the head of a King as gage of battle', had declared war upon Great Britain and Holland. To Dundas, this news, although long expected, was most unwelcome. Never having shared the feelings of those ardent defenders of the old régime in France who had asserted that Jacobinism could not be exterminated in Great Britain without striking at its source in Paris, he had hoped to preserve peace. In November 1792, after the Convention had issued its decree promising help and fraternity to all peoples struggling to be free, he had written a letter to his under-secretary at the Home Office expressing doubt as to 'the Propriety of our abusing the French Nation'. He then said:

I think the strength of our cause consists in maintaining that we have nothing to do with the internal politics of Foreign Nations, that we have already undergone all the consequences of Civil disturbances which were terminated by a Revolution which has rendered us happy for more than a century, and we will not submit to or countenance any other revolution in this Country.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, when the events of the next two months made war inevitable, Dundas, though fully convinced that the struggle must be vigorously prosecuted, can hardly have entered light-heartedly upon his duties as the minister directly charged with the conduct of military operations. Nevertheless, filled with that confidence in his own powers of work which on occasion led him to overreach himself, he never thought of shrinking from the task. Any consideration that he

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.6, D. to Nepean, Nov. 25, 1792; also quoted in Veitch, *Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, p. 235.

may have given to his own ignorance of the art of war was outweighed in his mind by a well-justified conviction that he was the indispensable prop of the Pitt Government. Pitt depended on him not only for his talents as a politician, but he had also by this time come to depend upon him as more than ever his most trusted adviser on great affairs of state. Even had Dundas wished to have no share in the conduct of the war, Pitt would have compelled him to take such share. When, at times of disaster, in later years he begged to be relieved, his requests were met with immediate refusal by the Prime Minister, who on one occasion was obliged to call upon assistance from the King to force his colleague to obey him. Dundas accordingly remained in charge of the conduct of the war, at first as Home Secretary and later as Secretary of State for War, until the resignation of the Pitt Government in March 1801.

If we look back upon the military history of these eight years, we can easily see what the British ought to have done under ideal conditions. They should have concentrated their military effort in one sphere of operations, preferably in Flanders or in the royalist provinces of Western France or in the Mediterranean. Their policy should have been guided by a minister who combined military experience with administrative talents, a man with vision enough to see that an army recruited under an antiquated system and controlled by three conflicting authorities, a Commander-in-Chief, a Secretary-*at-War*, and a Secretary of State, could not be an efficient instrument of war. Conditions, however, are seldom if ever ideal. Wars have to be managed with due regard to the prejudices of the public and the exigencies of party politics. Inefficiency with occasional defeat in the field is, when contrasted with the chaos that might attend an overturn in the home Government, usually the lesser evil. As things then were, the British wasted a large part of their resources in widely scattered and ill-timed operations

on all fronts. Instead of throwing all the men they could into Toulon, they sent the available troops to die of yellow fever in the West Indies; instead of supporting the Royalists in the Vendée or of marching directly on Paris from Flanders, they wasted their energies in besieging Dunkirk. The war dragged on until the entrance of Spain as an enemy temporarily shut them out of the Mediterranean and the greatest military genius of the age appeared upon the scene. Eight years of effort left them without a secure foothold on the continent of Europe or in the French West Indies. Their gains were, for the most part, in the Mediterranean and the Eastern Seas: Minorca, Malta, the Cape, Ceylon, a wider sphere of influence in Egypt and the Near East. All these were, if retained at a peace, acquisitions of immense value for the future of the Empire, but of little immediate use in combatting Napoleon's ascendancy in Europe.

For the miscarriage of operations on the Continent and for the wastage of men and money in the West Indies, Dundas must, unquestionably, as the minister chiefly responsible, shoulder a large part of the blame.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that, on many occasions, he issued contradictory orders, interfered with commanders in the field unnecessarily, and promised troops which never arrived because an inefficient bureaucracy could not arm or equip them speedily enough. On the other hand, we should bear in mind that the policy of frittering away troops on several widely scattered enterprises was as much Pitt's as it was his. In the later years of war, he was often forced against his better judgement into enterprises which were fathered by individuals or political groups who would not keep quiet unless some attention were given them. In order

<sup>1</sup> In his *History of the British Army* (vol. iv) Sir John Fortescue has criticized Dundas's conduct of the war with great severity, using such terms as 'deplorable impostor', 'extreme incapacity', 'insufferable conceit', 'incurably negligent even of the most elementary military arrangements'. (See Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 55.) My own feeling is that Sir John Fortescue has criticized Dundas too severely. It is noteworthy that Dr. J. H. Rose and Sir Julian Corbett are also of opinion that these criticisms are too unsparing.

to do him justice, we must remember that he was so overwhelmed with work that all details of military expenditure, recruiting, and dispositions of troops had to be left to subordinates. He only saw such letters as his secretaries thought important enough for his perusal and he had to depend on information which often proved to be false. His mistakes as a War Minister were not caused by gross and wilful incompetence of the most reprehensible sort. He was surrounded, as he put it, by 'a multitude of jarring interests' which 'created a sad expenditure of his time', and one cannot question the earnestness with which he attempted to cope with war, home, colonial, and Indian affairs. On one occasion he was simultaneously arranging expeditions to the West Indies and Mauritius, planning naval co-operation with the allies in the Mediterranean, preparing dispatches to be taken to Canada by Lord Dorchester (Sir Guy Carleton), and keeping abreast of India business.<sup>1</sup> Even though zeal and indefatigability cannot make up for a lack of that intellectual capacity and vision which can foresee the future, neither they nor the ideas of war prevailing at the time should be left out of account.

If we look at these events from the contemporary point of view, it is hard for us to see how a West Indian campaign could have been avoided. Dundas, with his conservative trend of mind, was the last person who could have been expected to escape from the thralldom of the old ideas of the importance of the French West Indies, ideas which dated back to the Seven Years War and before. When French planters, in fear of Negro insurrections, appealed, themselves, for British occupation of the islands, no Government could have refused to embark upon some sort of a West Indian enterprise. Popular sentiment was unquestionably in favour of such a policy.<sup>2</sup> A curious instance of this is found

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 14th Rept., App. V, Dropmore MSS. ii. 395, D. to Grenville, June 1, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 57, quoting the view of Sir Julian Corbett, the naval historian.

in a letter of an anonymous 'literary person' who urged Dundas to prosecute the war vigorously, particularly in the West Indies, 'for there, after all, must the business be decided'.<sup>1</sup> No such urgings were needed, for the minister had taken up the West Indian project at the very beginning of the war, and was to cling to it with a most fatal tenacity. In July 1793 he wrote to Grenville that, as Britain was doing her share on the Continent, few foreign troops should be hired, and all available British troops should be sent to the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> In 1795 he even contemplated withdrawing the Scotch Brigade from India in order to send it, together with hired German troops, to St. Domingo, and wrote that success in Holland 'in conjunction with St. Domingo would give everything either for peace or war we could wish'.<sup>3</sup> In all these plans, Pitt, who wrote 'every act of Dundas's is as much mine as his',<sup>4</sup> and insisted in 1796 that 'we ought now (with a view either to war or peace) to make St. Domingo our first object of offence', appears to have co-operated with Dundas to the full with but one brief moment of misgiving. On October 11, 1793, he wrote:

. . . Any long delay in the West Indian expedition is, I think, out of the question, and Dundas seems adverse to any. But I cannot help thinking it worth a few days delay to ascertain what turn things take in Flanders, and whether the French project of invasion is anything more than words; if it is, I am still for sending [troops] to the West Indies, but some additional exertions will then be necessary to make the country take care of its own defence.<sup>5</sup>

Here lies the tragedy of the whole sorry business of the West Indies. Had Pitt persevered in such misgivings and had Dundas given such counsels more

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 754, Edwards, Anon. letter dated 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 14th Rept., App. V, Dropmore MSS. ii. 407, D. to Grenville, July 1793.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 102, D. to Grenville, Aug. 17, 1795, and iii. 128, D. to Grenville, Aug. 28, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 597, Pitt to Grenville, July 5, 1794. See also, the same to the same, Dec. 8, 1793, where Pitt says 'Direct your reply to Dundas in case I am not in town.'

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 443, Pitt to Grenville, Oct. 11, 1793.

thought, a decisive success might have been had in Flanders, or even at Toulon, where the British lost another golden opportunity. This seems the more probable when we reflect that nearly 100,000 men and several hundreds of thousands of pounds were used in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> As it was, Dundas diverted to the West Indies and to Brittany the troops that he had promised to Toulon.<sup>2</sup> In Flanders, he was far too much inclined to rely on subsidies and allies to take the place of British troops. Supported by public opinion, he made Dunkirk the object of the first campaign and no decisive success was ever achieved in the Netherlands. Even after the French had overrun Holland in the winter of 1794-5, Dundas persisted in futile attempts for its reconquest. In subsequent years, three expeditions for the invasion of Holland were either in contemplation or actually put in train.<sup>3</sup>

On the whole the best that can be said of these West Indian campaigns, which may possibly have prevented victory from being won in Europe, is that the results in the islands themselves might have been far worse had no troops been sent. Even though it is true that five years of fighting came to naught in St. Domingo, where the negro leader Toussaint l'Ouverture established his supremacy in 1798, the British expeditions probably saved the other islands from the anarchy, desolation, and hideous race war which was the lot of St. Domingo from 1791 to 1798. Martinique was taken by the British in 1793, and Tobago in 1794. Guadeloupe and St. Lucia were also captured in 1794, but were temporarily lost in 1795, when slave-insurrections, under the leadership of Hugues, a disciple of Robespierre, broke out in those islands and in Grenada and St. Vincent.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the Maroons, or Spanish half-castes living

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, J. W., *The British Army 1783-1802*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Fortescue, J. W., *History of the British Army*, iv. 175.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., in 1796, 1798, 1799, see Fortescue, *op. cit.*, iv. 520, 587, 645. On this last occasion, it was Pitt, seconded by Grenville, who insisted on such an expedition.

<sup>4</sup> Muir, R., *A Short History of the British Commonwealth*, ii. 188.



in the interior of Jamaica revolted. To quell those disturbances, the forces which Dundas sent out were desperately needed and more troops would have been welcome. Parts of these forces likewise conquered Dutch Guiana in 1796 and Trinidad in 1797, after Holland and Spain had entered the war.

Since the West Indies had been chosen as the main theatre of operations to the exclusion even of Flanders, it would seem impossible to escape the conclusion that the policy of dispatching expeditions to aid the French Royalists in Brittany and Poitou was unwise. Dundas, however, should not be obliged to bear the whole of the blame. All the expeditions, except the first, which set out in 1793 after the Vendean revolt had reached its highest pitch of success, were in large measure the result of the pleadings of William Windham, Secretary-at-War, and the blandishments of French emigrés, such as the Comte de Puisaye. Windham, who was obsessed with the idea that an invasion of Brittany would win the war, never tired of urging such projects on Pitt and Dundas.<sup>1</sup> The history of the first expedition, and of the others that were thus brought into being, is singularly inglorious. On the first occasion, Dundas, after rashly promising troops when none were ready, collected a force of about six thousand by diverting regiments intended for Flanders and the West Indies. These were finally sent off under Lord Moira,<sup>2</sup> but arrived in December 1793 too late to be of any use to the defeated Royalists.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, when Royalist hopes were high, Pitt, hopelessly prevented by the demands of the West Indian campaign from doing anything effective, allowed the fleet to convoy an emigré expedition to Quiberon. This enterprise of the Comte de Puisaye, for whose doings Windham assumed

<sup>1</sup> *The Windham Papers*, i. 309. Windham to Pitt, Oct. 16, 1795; and other letters *passim*, 1794, 1795, and 1796. In 1794 Dundas opposed Windham's attack on the Duke of York, who was shortly appointed Commander-in-Chief and who was responsible for bringing order out of chaos in the Army.

<sup>2</sup> Better known as Lord Rawdon for his achievements during the American War.

<sup>3</sup> Fortescue, J. W., *op. cit.*, iv. 153-6.

full responsibility, came to grief at the hands of the Republican General Hoche in June 1795. To retrieve this disaster, Dundas and Pitt, once more after persistent urging from Windham, sent out a small number of troops with the Comte D'Artois (later Charles X) in a vain hope that the presence of a prince of the blood would rouse the West of France. This expedition, badly mismanaged at the start by Dundas, remained isolated in the island of Yeu until withdrawn in December 1795.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, the Government contented itself with merely harassing the west coast of France. In 1798, Dundas wrote that it would not be his fault 'if, with one expedition after another, the coast of France is allowed to sleep sound any one week during the summer'.<sup>2</sup> His efforts in that direction may be said to have ended with an expedition, also badly mismanaged and also sponsored by Windham, which was sent to Belle Isle in 1800.<sup>3</sup>

Under ordinary conditions, the disasters of the first years of war might well have imperilled the stability of the Pitt Government, but the conditions were not ordinary. The party in opposition was tainted with 'Jacobinism'. Many of its famous members, notably Burke, who had unhesitatingly criticized the policies of Pitt during the previous decade, became most ardent advocates of the preservation of the 'established order' in Church and State. In the early summer of 1794, the Opposition was hopelessly weakened by the defection of the Duke of Portland and his followers, who entered into a coalition with the Government. It is regrettable that, on this occasion, Dundas did not enter wholeheartedly into Pitt's plans for strengthening the Cabinet. Although Pitt was then anxious to revive the third Secretaryship of State for Dundas, make it a Secretaryship for War, and thus confine Dundas's duties strictly to the war, an arrangement which would leave the Home Secretaryship open for Portland, Dundas, overconfident in his own powers of work, was perfectly

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, J. W., *op. cit.*, iv. 421-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 776.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

willing to remain as he was. At first, he wrote to Pitt that there was no need of a separate Secretary for War, since the management of the war was really the joint production of the whole Cabinet under the leadership of Pitt, whom the public would always regard as the war minister.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately he was overruled, but not until such a dispute had broken out between him and the Duke of Portland that the King had to be called in to insist on Dundas's acceptance of the new office.<sup>2</sup> The accession of the Portland Whigs made the Government absolutely secure. Thereafter it had only to fear dissensions within itself, the chief of which was the growing irritation of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Grenville, whose jealousy of Dundas and desire to supplant him in Pitt's affections hampered the execution of military plans.<sup>3</sup>

If Dundas's management of the war in Europe and the West Indies left much to be desired, his conduct of affairs in Africa and the East certainly did not. That he should have been more successful in a sphere of activity with which he was already very familiar is not at all extraordinary. In 1791, when negotiations for a commercial treaty between the English and Dutch East India Companies were on foot, Dundas was fully aware of the weakness of the Dutch colonial empire. He then wrote to Lord Auckland:

... The jealousies and apprehensions of the Dutch relative to the Navigation of the Eastern Seas ... rest on a ground they dare not avow. I mean their consciousness of the radical and internal weakness of the sovereignty they claim in the Eastern Isles, and they are afraid that the communication we may have with the Natives would lay the foundation for their total shaking off of the miserable dependence in which they are held by the Dutch.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rose, J. H., *Pitt*, ii. 271-2.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 441, Pitt to Grenville, Oct. 10, 1793; *ibid.* iv. 79, D. to G., Feb. 12, 1798. For Grenville's jealousy see *ibid.* ii. 483, G. to P., Dec. 22, 1793; *ibid.* iii. 167, G. to P., Jan. 25, 1796; P.R.O., Chatham MSS. 157, D. to P., Apr. 11, 1800 (orig.).

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Ld. Auckland (Sir Wm. Eden), Aug. 23, 1791 (copy).

In order to prove his point, Dundas cited the report of Captain Blankett, who had convoyed the East India Company's China fleet in 1790 because of the danger of war with Spain over the Nootka-Sound affair. This officer's detailed report but confirmed many other evidences which Dundas had had of the 'slender tenure' by which Dutch power was preserved.<sup>1</sup> Under the circumstances Dundas felt that, if the Dutch knew their own interest, they would realize the futility of attempting 'to keep up establishments to protect their commerce against us [Britain] in India'.<sup>2</sup> Being of opinion that the spice trade was of no value to Britain, Dundas was in favour of an arrangement whereby the Dutch East India Company would place all their settlements within 'the benefit of British power and protection' in return for the spice trade and part of the China trade. He outlined the scheme thus:

. . . Under present circumstances, [i.e. the Dutch being unwilling] no further detail is relevant but if the negotiation is renewed sometime later when I have further information from Lord Cornwallis respecting Prince of Wales Island [Penang] and the Andaman harbours, I am positive I could demonstrate to you that if the Dutch would yield to us even something considerably less than the modified possession of Trincomalee we formerly asked, they might relieve themselves of the expense of every establishment on the continent of India, [Dundas apparently means Asia] receive a larger investment than they now receive; and by relieving us of the expense of Prince of Wales island or any other naval establishment in these seas, enable us to gratify them in their utmost wishes respecting the Eastern Seas and likewise in the article of opium. Nay more, if the same spirit of amity was extended to a proper understanding between us at Canton, we would not only both be great gainers in the purchase of the China investment but that trade would exclusively belong to our two nations with a very considerable addition to each of us beyond what we now have.<sup>3</sup>

The placing of the Dutch settlements within 'British

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Ld. Auckland (Sir Wm. Eden), Aug. 23, 1791 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

power and protection' had therefore been for some years one of the cardinal points of Dundas's Indian policy.

The French Revolution but intensified the necessity of curbing French intrigues in the East, where Tippoo Sultan was being materially assisted by French officers in his war with Lord Cornwallis. The revolutionary Government of France made haste to transfer the catch-words and the philosophy of the French Revolution to India and other parts of the world. By announcing that a negro was equal to a white man, they nearly wrecked the British colonies in the West Indies. In India, Tippoo was dubbed 'Citizen Tippoo' and amused himself with 'trees of liberty'.<sup>1</sup> It needed no great sagacity to perceive that an alliance between the French Government and the 'Patriot' party in Holland who were still at odds with the Stadtholder, William V, would in all probability mean French control of the Dutch colonies. Dundas was shrewd enough to know that, in such circumstances, questions of mere legal sovereignty meant little. His letter, above quoted, shows that he felt Britain could gain all that she needed by taking the Dutch colonies under her 'protection'. The French knew that their aims could be accomplished in the same way. For these reasons, both powers seldom talked officially of Holland and her colonies in terms of formal conquest.

The Cape of Good Hope was obviously the Dutch colony first in importance from a British point of view. As Captain Blankett aptly put it, 'what was a feather in the hands of Holland will become a sword in the hands of France'.<sup>2</sup> We have already mentioned the attention which the British paid to the Cape in the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 703, Edwards, paper sent by Lady Wellesley to D. Scott (c. 1796): 'Tippoo is seen to gather into his court French adventurers. . . . He permits them to form clubs, to profess the principles of democracy, to humble the attributes of royalty, to hoist the national colours, to set the tree of liberty up at Places under Arms [Place aux Armes] at Seringapatam. He partook of their civil feasts and permitted himself to be called Citizen Sultan. Therefore the English spread the report that Tippoo Sahib was become jacobin.'

<sup>2</sup> Theal, G. M., *Records of the Cape Colony*, i. 26.

previous decade.<sup>1</sup> Even before war was formally begun in 1793, the East India Company requested Lord Grenville to order Lord Auckland, then ambassador at The Hague, to discuss with the Dutch East India Company the sending of British troops from St. Helena to protect the Cape.<sup>2</sup> In March 1793, the States-General ordered that no provisions should be sent to the French colonies of Mauritius (Isle de France) and Réunion (Bourbon) in the Indian Ocean, but they were not sympathetic to the landing of any British troops and preferred naval protection instead.<sup>3</sup> Late in the month, the Cabinet officially promised British aid, and the officials of the Dutch East India Company appeared willing to allow the landing of troops.<sup>4</sup> At this juncture, negotiations began in earnest. Dundas requested full information about the Cape and averred: 'It is impossible for this country to view with indifference any circumstance that can endanger the safety of that Settlement.'<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for his hopes, the Dutch authorities changed their minds because the French invasion of the Netherlands had been partially checked. They sent the information desired, but still insisted upon naval rather than military protection.<sup>6</sup> The question of the Cape therefore remained unsettled during the summer and the greater part of the following year 1794.

In November 1794, when the complete subjugation of Holland by the French was imminent, Dundas set forth in a letter to Grenville the policy which he subsequently pursued in regard to the Cape. Writing from Wimbledon, he said:

... If the French either by conquest or treaty get possession of the seat and instruments of the Dutch Government, and have their senses about them, their first act will be to send a French force on board the Dutch shipping to the Cape and take possession of it. There are, I am afraid, too many

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>3</sup> Theal, *op. cit.*, i. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Theal, *op. cit.*, i. 10-11, D. to Grenville, Apr. 23, 1793.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* i. 12-16.

<sup>2</sup> Theal, *op. cit.*, i. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 8.

democrats and disaffected subjects there to leave any doubt of their being too cordially received. We must be beforehand with them and the means of it are not difficult. I need not trouble you with the detail, but some authority from the Dutch Government is necessary, and the foundation of the transaction ought to be a liberty to us to lodge at the Cape any force we please, to be protected as a Dutch possession and for their behoof when peace is restored; but, in the mean time, to be defended at all events against any attempt of a French force to possess it.<sup>1</sup>

The complete triumph of the 'Patriot' party in Holland which caused William V, Prince of Orange, to fly to England in January 1795, greatly facilitated the accomplishment of this plan. Early in February, the official letters of the Prince authorizing the occupation of the Cape by a British force were obtained. Under the authority of these, an expedition was sent out to the Cape under Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone (later Lord Keith) and General Sir J. H. Craig. Contrary to the British expectations, the Dutch governor refused to obey the mandate of the Prince of Orange, thus delaying the capture of Cape Town until September 1795, when the arrival of reinforcements under General Sir Alured Clarke made further resistance useless.<sup>2</sup> Although the conquest of the Cape was carried out under the nominal authority of the Prince of Orange, there can be little doubt that the British thought of it as a British possession in actual fact. The language of George III's promise to the Prince made the restoration of the Cape conditional upon the re-establishment of the Dutch Government precisely as it was *before* the war.<sup>3</sup> In summing up the achievements of his administration before Parliament in December 1795, Pitt classed the Cape with Martinique as a 'conquest',<sup>4</sup> and Dundas did the same, adding that he 'begged to observe here that the instant the French got

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., 14th Rept., App. V, Dropmore MSS. ii. 645, D. to Grenville, Nov. 16, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> Theal, *op. cit.*, vol. i, dispatches from and to the Cape, June-Sept. 1795.

<sup>3</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. iii. 26, official note.

<sup>4</sup> *Parl. Hist.* xxxii. 585.

possession of Holland, the idea occurred to him' of sending an expedition to capture the Cape.<sup>1</sup>

While the British expeditions were proceeding to the Cape, the affairs of another great Dutch colony, Ceylon, were seldom absent from Dundas's mind. In many ways Ceylon was no less important than the Cape. In the hands of the French, it could be used as a base of operations from which support might be sent to Tippoo Sultan, who was momentarily expected to renew hostilities with the English. Sir John Sinclair, Dundas's old opponent in Scottish politics, knew of a plan, formed by the Marquis de Bouillé before the French Revolution, which provided for the conquest of British India by troops sent from Ceylon.<sup>2</sup> As it happened, the British conquest of Ceylon in 1795-6 was made possible by a Scottish professor and a Swiss count, whose extraordinary and romantic adventures have hitherto received little attention.<sup>3</sup>

Having resigned his chair in 1793 after twenty years of service, Hugh Cleghorn, formerly Professor of Civil History at the University of St. Andrews, undertook a tour of the Continent. In the course of his travels, he met and became intimately acquainted with Count Charles de Meuron of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, colonel-proprietor of a regiment of 1,200 men stationed at Colombo, Ceylon, in the service of the Dutch East India Company and under the command of his brother Pierre Frédéric de Meuron. From his conversations with the count, Cleghorn gathered that the count would not be averse to selling this regiment into the British service on suitable terms. On his return home at the beginning of 1795, Cleghorn laid the plan before Dundas, who at once recognized it to be of utmost importance. He saw that, if it could be carried out, the withdrawal of 1,200 men from the small garrison at

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Hist.* xxxii. 600-1.

<sup>2</sup> Sinclair, Sir J., *Correspondence*, i. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from the account of Sir John Sinclair (*Corr.* i. 108-9), no notice appears to have been taken of this story until the publication of *The Cleghorn Papers*, 1927. The following account is taken from the document there printed.



Colombo would force the Governor of Ceylon to surrender without firing a shot. In February Dundas wrote a dispatch authorizing Cleghorn to negotiate with the count for the purchase of the regiment. In the event of success, Cleghorn was ordered to proceed to Ceylon by the overland route, taking the count with him, if possible.

Armed with this dispatch and a Government draft for £1,500, Cleghorn set out from Yarmouth on the great adventure. Arriving at Hamburg, he proceeded to the Rhine and through the contending armies to Neuchâtel, where he and the count had planned a secret interview. Although Dundas in a second letter had permitted him to offer the count a *douceur* of as much as £2,000, he found this unnecessary. An arrangement for the transfer of the regiment was entered into without much difficulty. The count did, however, insist upon George III's promise of the rank of Major-General and an advance of £4,000 on his salary to pay his debts. On the arrival of this promise and a letter from the Prince of Orange similar to that authorizing the British occupation of the Cape, the count was finally persuaded to set out with Hugh Cleghorn for Ceylon. His decision was not made without many misgivings. The journey, difficult and hazardous for any man, was certain to be more so for a man over sixty already accustomed to a life of peaceful retirement.

Although the agreement for the purchase of the regiment had been concluded at the end of March 1795, the preparations for the journey took more than a month, since everything had to be done secretly in order that the count's departure should cause no inkling of his real destination to reach the French or Dutch governments. The likelihood of suspicion being aroused was so great that Cleghorn reluctantly decided not to go to Stuttgart in an attempt to conclude a similar treaty with the Duke of Württemberg for the transfer of the Württemberg regiments which were in

the Dutch service at the Cape, Ceylon, and Batavia. At last, on May 18, 1795, Cleghorn and Count de Meuron, with an *entourage* of two secretaries and two servants, set sail from Venice in the *Innocenza*, a Venetian ship bound for Egypt. Arriving at Alexandria after a pleasant passage of twenty-two days, they went at once to the house of George Baldwin, the British consul. Baldwin, probably the best informed and most enterprising European in the Levant,<sup>1</sup> told them that the Dutch consul was expecting dispatches from Holland to be forwarded to the East. At once, Cleghorn authorized Baldwin either to bribe the Dutch consul or to have the messenger whom the consul might send with dispatches seized and robbed of them in the desert. In writing this order Cleghorn was careful to stipulate that the messenger should not be murdered. In conclusion, he wrote:

. . . At all events, I cannot take upon myself to authorize you to draw for any sum exceeding £300. From my knowledge of the character of Mr. Secretary Dundas, and from his zeal and activity at the Board at which he presides, I am led to hope that he will blame neither of us for exerting our best endeavours, though we may not be so fortunate as to fall upon the best methods of serving the public.<sup>2</sup>

After an uneventful voyage up the Nile, Cleghorn and his party arrived at Cairo on June 17, 1795, and were provided for by Mr. Rossetti, the Austrian consul. Here Cleghorn learned that 'treaties when not accompanied with presents produce no effect in this country'.<sup>3</sup> After many exasperating delays and a further diminution of the extra funds which Dundas had recently sent, the party left Cairo on June 28, 1795, in a caravan of eighty camels. Although Mr. Rossetti had been suspected of French leanings, he dealt fairly with Cleghorn. No untoward incident occurred in the desert, and the Anglo-Swiss caravan reached Suez on

<sup>1</sup> Hoskins, H. L., *British Routes to India*, pp. 10-11; Baldwin began his career in the Levant in 1760.

<sup>2</sup> *Cleghorn Papers*, p. 54, Cleghorn to Baldwin, June 10, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62, Cleghorn to D., June 25, 1795.

July 1. The Europeans had been previously warned that there was only one ship at Suez, an 'Arab' of less than one hundred tons, waiting to take on board four or five thousand pilgrims for Mecca. Under such conditions, the voyage to Jidda, half-way down the Red Sea, was an indescribable nightmare to the Swiss count and his companions, who were cooped up in one stuffy cabin where they cooked their own food. Having narrowly escaped shipwreck, they arrived at Jidda on August 2, only to be fleeced unmercifully by a Venetian merchant. This person, who acted by consent of the Arabian officials, had them completely in his power, since all the English ships had sailed for India nine days before. Ultimately, they were allowed to proceed in another Arabian ship almost as badly crowded as the first. On the 18th of August, they landed at the English factory at Mocha and were among friends once more. The hire of the ship and the extortion of merchants had amounted to £1,113.

Losing no time, Cleghorn and his party sailed for India on the same ship, although the captain had treated them shamefully. Even after leaving Mocha, he so ill provided his craft that lack of water forced him into Tellicherry on the Malabar coast, hundreds of miles from the point Cleghorn wished to reach. At Tellicherry, Cleghorn learned on September 6, 1795, that a British force under Colonel Stuart had already landed in the northern part of Ceylon and that the Dutch were withdrawing their outlying garrisons to protect Colombo. The Governor of Ceylon, Van Angelbeck, had refused to take any notice of the orders of the Prince of Orange and was preparing to make a stubborn resistance. On hearing this, Cleghorn made all speed by sea to Anjengo, near the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, whence he proceeded by land via Palamcotta to Tuticorin on the east coast. From Tuticorin, he hastened to Negapatam by sea. Having learned that Colonel Stuart had ordered another regiment into Ceylon, and being anxious to avoid

bloodshed, he then took to sea in an open boat, crossed the narrow strait to Ceylon, and arriving at Point Pedro, informed Colonel Stuart on September 28, 1795, of the approaching transfer of the Régiment de Meuron to the British service. Within three days Cleghorn reached Madras and reported in person to the Governor, Lord Hobart.

Meanwhile, Count de Meuron had gone to Cuddalore to meet Major P. A. Agnew, another friend of Dundas's, whom Lord Hobart had detailed to go to Colombo under flag of truce and demand the transfer of the regiment. There were, nevertheless, many difficulties still to be surmounted. The count's brother commanding the regiment at Colombo had to be informed of the transfer by means of a letter smuggled into his hands in a Dutch cheese, since the Governor would not allow the English to speak to him. When Agnew first arrived, the Governor blustered and threatened to hold the Swiss troops prisoners in Colombo, but he was compelled to see the folly of such an attempt within a few hours. Although one company had been sent to Java and two had been captured at Trincomalee before Cleghorn reached India, there were about six hundred Swiss effectives in Colombo. Better officered and better disciplined, they could have given a great deal of trouble to the remaining eight hundred and thirty European soldiers and sailors, of whom about a third were Württembergers. Further difficulties ensued because the Madras Government was dilatory in providing sufficient transports to take the Swiss to India.

Although the withdrawal of the Swiss in November deprived Governor Van Angelbeck of the backbone of his European force, he enlisted natives and civilians to the number of about two thousand. Claiming a force of 2,700 men, he still refused to surrender. The conquest of Ceylon was therefore delayed until the passing of the north-east monsoon made it possible for the British to march their force southward from Point

Pedro and Trincomalee. After a few insignificant brushes with the natives, they arrived before Colombo and received its surrender on February 16, 1796.<sup>1</sup>

This result would doubtless have been achieved in time by the unaided efforts of the Madras Government, but the credit for the almost bloodless conquest of Ceylon must go to Professor Cleghorn. It also goes without saying that Cleghorn's achievement depended in large part on Dundas's active and prompt co-operation with his plans. In announcing the surrender of Colombo, Lord Hobart wrote to Dundas that his satisfaction was greatly 'enchanced by the consideration of the additional fame which you, as an Indian minister, must acquire by the annexation of possessions of such inestimable worth to the British Empire'.<sup>2</sup> In his dispatch, Lord Hobart gave Cleghorn full credit for what he had done.<sup>3</sup> The professor himself, well content with his work, made a tour of Ceylon and returned home to lay the information he had gathered before Dundas. In 1798, he was again sent to Ceylon as secretary to the first governor, Frederick North, but owing to differences with his chief he retired to Scotland. Thirty-six years later, he died at the age of eighty-five. Engraved on his tombstone are the words:

In memory of Hugh Cleghorn of Stravithie  
Professor of Civil and Natural History in the  
University of St. Andrews who died in February  
1836 and is buried here. He was the agent by  
whose instrumentality the Island of Ceylon was  
annexed to the British Empire.<sup>4</sup>

During the remainder of his official career, Dundas paid especial attention to the Cape and Ceylon as the chief colonial conquests of the war. In his first speech

<sup>1</sup> The above account of the adventures of Cleghorn and the capture of Ceylon is a brief summary, taken from the diaries and correspondence printed in *The Cleghorn Papers*, ed. W. Neil, London, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Feb. 23, 1796.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Oct. 23, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> *Cleghorn Papers*, pp. 287-8, and p. 1. Count de Meuron returned to Neuchâtel in 1798 and died in 1806.

after the capture,<sup>1</sup> Dundas had said that the Cape must not be given up without adequate compensation, and, within a year, he was advocating that it should not be given up at all.<sup>2</sup> Lord Glenbervie, who thought Dundas 'an enthusiast (as far as a hackneyed politician can be) about the Cape',<sup>3</sup> wrote in his diary of a conversation between Dundas and Pitt late in 1796. It seems that, as they were riding to town together from Wimbledon one morning, Pitt said, 'We must keep the Cape or Ceylon', and Dundas answered '*Both*'. In administering the Cape, Dundas did not make the mistake of garrisoning it with hired foreign troops,<sup>4</sup> and he also refused to countenance a suggestion for the raising of a corps of Kaffirs to be used in South Africa under the direction of British officers.<sup>5</sup> Lord Macartney, the ablest man available as a result of his work in India and China, was sent out as the first governor. In order to conciliate the Dutch as much as possible, Dundas appointed, as secretary to the governor, Andrew Barnard, who had married Lady Ann Lindsay, an old friend of Dundas's and a woman of rare tact and social charm, exactly suited for the work of being first lady of the new colony.<sup>6</sup> Her letters<sup>7</sup> are the best contemporary account of life at Capetown after the first British conquest.

The news of the capture of the Cape and of the impending surrender of Colombo, which arrived in the spring of 1796, was especially welcome to Dundas. These solid successes, which in a measure made up for the disasters in other theatres of war, gave encouragement to the Government, which was then in the throes of a political campaign in preparation for the General

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Hist.* xxxii. 485, Dec. 9, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, Sylvester (Lord Glenbervie), *Diaries*, ed. Francis Bickley, i. 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, Dropmore MSS. iii. 185, Grenville to George III, Apr. 1, 1796.

<sup>5</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 30. 1, D. to Chas. Grenville, Mar. 15, 1797.

<sup>6</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Barnard, Lady Ann (Lindsay), letters published under title *South Africa a Century Ago*. Mr. Lovat-Fraser thinks Lady Ann was in love with Dundas. Her letters to him were found tied in a separate packet.

Election of June 1796. In January, Dundas had already shown the extent of his power in Scotland by ousting Henry Erskine, the ablest of the Scottish Whigs, from the Deanship of the Faculty of Advocates. This action was precipitated by the Dean's attendance at a meeting of protest against the new anti-sedition bills which had been brought forward in Parliament after the King had been attacked in October 1795. Since Erskine was, by common consent, one of the ablest lawyers in Great Britain, unquestionably far abler than Dundas's nephew, who replaced him, no defence can be made for Dundas's act save that of political partisanship. This affair, which caused a great sensation in Scotland, drew two stanzas from Robert Burns:<sup>1</sup>

Dire was the hate at old Harlaw\*  
 That Scot to Scot did carry  
 And dire the discord Langside saw  
 For beauteous hapless Mary.†  
 But Scot with Scot ne'er met so hot  
 Or were more in fury seen, Sir  
 Than 'twixt Hal‡ and Bob,§ for the famous job  
 Who should be Faculty's Dean, Sir,

\*Battle of Harlaw, 1412. †Mary, Queen of Scots. ‡Henry Erskine.  
 § Robert Dundas.

In the June election, Dundas's power rose to its highest point in Scotland, and this supremacy, coupled with favourable results in England and Wales, made Pitt's Government still more secure.

Such triumphs were unhappily destined to be short-lived. Though the political situation gave little cause for anxiety, the war news shortly became more depressing than ever. The latter part of the year 1796 and the year 1797 were filled with disasters in the West Indies, in India, in Ireland, and in the Mediterranean. Friction in the Cabinet, where Grenville was slowly but surely supplanting Dundas in Pitt's affections, increased to such a pitch that Dundas once again sought to confide the conduct of the war to other hands.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

The troubled situation in India, where the Supreme Government and the Madras Government were at loggerheads and the Bengal Army was on the verge of mutiny, gave him the opportunity in January 1797 to plead with Pitt for permission to go out himself as Governor-General. Although this proposal was warmly seconded by Lord Cornwallis, the Prime Minister would not hear of Dundas's retiring from the direction of the war.<sup>1</sup> Cornwallis, a martyr to duty, was again prevailed upon to accept the Government of India, but was later prevented from leaving by the outbreak of rebellion in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> At this juncture Dundas, again at his wits' end and much tried by Pitt's apparent willingness to surrender the Cape if peace could not be had on other terms,<sup>3</sup> made another determined but equally vain effort to be allowed to go to Calcutta as Governor-General.<sup>4</sup> More serious, however, than anything that occurred in Ireland or India were the events which transpired, during these fateful months, in the Mediterranean, where Pitt and Dundas, unaware of the budding genius of the young general of the Army of Italy, had lost their golden opportunity in the spring of 1796. Had they supplied Sir Gilbert Elliot, the British governor of Corsica, with sufficient forces, it is probable that Bonaparte's small columns could never have reached Italy; but this was not to be. Corsica, which the British had occupied after evacuating Toulon, was neglected by Pitt, who confided the supervision of it to the Duke of Portland. Dundas, though aware of its value as a base for the fleet, considered it of secondary importance in comparison with his plans for colonial conquests overseas. After all opportunities for stopping Bonaparte had been lost, its mere retention may have been in itself a grave error of policy, for it was one of those sources of irritation which caused the Court of

<sup>1</sup> Ross, C., *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 317-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 324-6.

<sup>3</sup> Peace negotiations were carried on in the autumn of 1796 and again in the spring and summer, when the situation was so desperate that Lord Malmesbury was sent to Lille.

<sup>4</sup> *Diaries of Lord Glenbervie*, ed. Bickley, i. 123.



Madrid to declare war upon Great Britain in the autumn of 1796. By this event, the whole state of affairs in the Mediterranean was changed. Corsica had to be abandoned and the British fleet had, temporarily, to be withdrawn from the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> It thus fell out that, within a year and a half, the young general who had returned in triumph from the conquest of Italy was able to begin that concentration of men and supplies and transports at Toulon which was soon to turn the eyes of the world towards Egypt, the gateway to the East.

In that part of the world, Dundas had earnestly endeavoured for several years to strengthen British interests. From the very beginning of the French Revolution, he realized the necessity of a vigorous British policy in Egypt and the Near East. He knew that the British could hardly maintain their position in India if any native power which might be ranged against them should receive assistance from France through Egypt or from Russia through Persia. Moreover there was always during these years the constant menace of an invasion of India by Zemaun Shah, the warlike and able ruler of Afghanistan, whose annual forays on the North-West Frontier struck terror into the native chieftains and alarmed the Governor-General at Calcutta. The veteran British Consul in Egypt, George Baldwin, the man who really stood between France and India for many years,<sup>2</sup> was warmly supported by Dundas.<sup>3</sup> It was no fault of his that Baldwin was dismissed just before war broke out in 1793. Lord Grenville, in an excess of economical zeal, discovered in April 1792 that Baldwin was drawing about £1,400 a year.<sup>4</sup> At once Dundas, who had recently received from Major Forbes Ross MacDonald<sup>5</sup> a long report

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of Corsica, see Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 255-7 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Hoskins, *op. cit.*, chs. i and ii, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Baldwin, Apr. 8, 1789 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 263, Grenville to D., Apr. 1, 1792.

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald had travelled extensively in the Near East.

advocating a British occupation of Egypt,<sup>1</sup> took alarm. Insisting that Baldwin's work was vital to British Indian interests, he prevented Baldwin's dismissal, but, within a few months, Grenville, newly aroused because the consulate was costing £2,000 instead of £1,400,<sup>2</sup> dismissed Baldwin on the very day, Feb. 8, 1793, that news of the French declaration of war reached England.<sup>3</sup> Although Dundas considered this extremely awkward, he could do nothing about it.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Baldwin made possible the capture of Pondicherry by getting the news of the outbreak of war to British India before the French officials had the slightest inkling of it.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, Lord Grenville's order of dismissal was lost on the journey to Egypt.<sup>6</sup> In the following year Baldwin concluded a treaty with the leading Bey which had some share in strengthening the British position in Egypt,<sup>7</sup> and which assisted the passage of Professor Cleghorn and Count de Meuron on their journey to Ceylon. Even after he learned of his dismissal, Baldwin continued to serve his country in Egypt without pay.<sup>8</sup> Old, infirm, and nearly blind, and suffering from an infection in his leg, Baldwin wrote a touching letter to Dundas when on his way home via Trieste in 1798. In this, he expressed confidence in Dundas as a friend who would not see him harmed, and attributed all his troubles to the failure of Grenville's dispatch to reach him. The letter concluded with a warning that Napoleon was bound for Egypt, where he would most certainly succeed unless Lord Nelson should checkmate him. To Baldwin, this seemed a forlorn hope. As he lay in a filthy lazaretto at Trieste, he thought of his forty years' work in Egypt as doomed to certain

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', MacDonald to D., Aug. 18, 1791 (précis).

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 373, Grenville to D., Jan. 25, 1793.

<sup>3</sup> Hoskins, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 621, D. to Grenville, Aug. 17, 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Hoskins, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-7. Grenville paid no attention to the treaty.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. Baldwin did his best to thwart Dubois-Thainville, who went to Egypt in 1795.

failure.<sup>1</sup> That this was not so was due neither to the sagacity or foresight of any one man nor to any one event. The frustration of the Napoleonic designs in the Near East resulted from a series of events over which no one individual exercised a decisive control. Dundas's first thought, on perceiving the Napoleonic intentions towards Egypt, seems to have been to localize the conflict by closing the outlet of the Red Sea and by preventing Zemaun Shah and the other Perso-Afghan chieftains from giving trouble. Although the British Cabinet was very obtuse in not discovering or guessing Napoleon's destination earlier, they lost no time in trying to protect India from the French contagion by bottling Napoleon up in Egypt. As soon as he was certain of Bonaparte's destination, Dundas sent large reinforcements to India from Gibraltar, Portugal, and the Cape in the spring of 1798.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, Lord Mornington (later Marquess Wellesley), the newly appointed Governor-General, had already arrived to begin preparations for the annihilation of Tippoo Sahib, Sultan of Mysore, the inevitable ally of the French. On June 18, 1798, Dundas ordered the Madras Government to co-operate with a naval expedition for the occupation of the island of Perim,<sup>3</sup> at the mouth of the Red Sea. As a result of these and other orders, the island was occupied in 1799 by a small detachment of Company troops, who suffered so terribly from the heat that they were transferred to Aden within a few months.<sup>4</sup> On September 28, 1798, three days before the news of Nelson's great victory at the Nile arrived in England, Dundas wrote to Grenville of the dangers of an alliance between Zemaun Shah and the French. With an available revenue of three crores of rupees, it

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 754, Baldwin to D., dated Trieste, July 6, 1798.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Fortescue thinks the dispatch of these reinforcements 'the best work recorded of Dundas during his direction of the war'. 'Dundas should receive credit for his courage and his zeal for India.' *British Army*, iv. 720.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange' letter-book, D. to Ld. Clive, June 18, 1798 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 694, Edwards, Gen. Clarke to D., Jan. 26, 1799; *ibid.*, lot 696, Duncan, Gov. of Bombay, to D., Dec. 17, 1799.

was quite possible that the ruler of Afghanistan could keep the British army occupied in northern India while Tippoo Sultan, aided by France, destroyed British power in the South. Since Russia was then friendly to Great Britain, Dundas suggested that she should incite Persia against Zemaun Shah. When he wrote this letter, Dundas said he was almost driven mad by the thought that the victory which Nelson would probably gain would come 'too late for India'.<sup>1</sup> Although the Battle of the Nile effectively cut Napoleon off from Europe, it would not in itself prevent him from proceeding to India by land. In December, Dundas proposed to send Colonel Maitland via Constantinople to the Red Sea in an effort to get Turkish co-operation for a plan of invasion of Egypt with British-Indian troops.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the protestations of Lord Mornington, nothing was done on this head in 1799.<sup>3</sup> What was done concerned Russia and Persia. In view of the very probable hostility of Russia, then ruled by the mad Czar, Paul I, it was most essential that British interests in Persia should be firmly established. Accordingly, in 1799, Captain John Malcolm left Bombay on his first mission to Persia, in order, as he said, 'to restore India from the annual alarm of Zemaun Shah's invasion, to counteract the possible attempts of those villainous democrats the French, and to restore to some part of its former prosperity a trade which has been in great degree lost'.<sup>4</sup> On his way to Persia, he made a very advantageous agreement with the Imam of Muscat which excluded the French from the Persian Gulf. In Persia itself, success attended his negotiations. The political and commercial treaties which he made were declared in force for some years by the Governor-General.<sup>5</sup> He was able to assure Dundas that nothing

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. iv. 326.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 701, Edwards, Mornington to D., May 16, 1799.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, A. T., *Persian Gulf*, p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> Hoskins, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8. Dundas's acknowledgement of Malcolm's

need be feared from Zemaun Shah, and to give him news of the Russian invasion of Georgia with ten thousand troops.<sup>1</sup>

In 1800, shortly after he had learned that Lord Mornington had defeated and killed Tippoo Sultan in a successful assault upon Seringapatam, Dundas took up the project of an expedition to Egypt from the Mediterranean. It was part of his plan that this expedition should be assisted by a force operating from India through the Red Sea. Not having received Lord Mornington's warning of July 13, 1800,<sup>2</sup> that the force at his disposal was too small to leave India, Dundas wrote to the Governor-General on September 4, 1800, that, as Egypt had been chosen by the Cabinet as a principal object of attack, the co-operation of India would be required.<sup>3</sup> Lord Mornington was obliged to divert to Egypt the armament then preparing in Ceylon for an attempt on Batavia and Mauritius.<sup>4</sup> The future Duke of Wellington took this force to Bombay, but an attack of fever, coupled with a disinclination to serve under Baird, to whom the command was given, prevented him from sailing for Egypt. This army reached Egypt and, after many hardships, arrived in Lower Egypt to discover that the expedition sent through Alexandria had already accomplished its

services is in Mel. MSS., Miscellaneous, in my possession, D. to Malcolm, Aug. 19, 1800 (copy).

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 765, Edwards, contains Malcolm's original dispatches in cipher, translated. Malcolm heard interesting tales of the French 'botanical' mission of Bruguère and Olivier which went out to Persia in 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 701, Edwards, Mornington to D., July 13, 1800.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Mornington, Sept. 4, 1800 (précis).

<sup>4</sup> When the conquest of the Dutch colonies was on foot, Dundas favoured expeditions to the East Indies. In 1795, the British captured Malacca, Amboyna, and Banda. See Mel. MSS., lot 694, Edwards, Abercromby to D., Nov. 4, 1795; 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Ramsay to D., Dec. 12, 1795; Wright and Reid, *Malay Peninsula*, pp. 93-4. In 1797 a fleet with the future Duke of Wellington on board got as far as Penang, but was recalled when the news of the Treaty of Campo Formio arrived in India. See Mel. MSS., lot 707, clipping 'Madras Gazette', June 8, 1799. In 1800 Lord Mornington, at Dundas's request, made preparations against Batavia, but the plan of invasion of Egypt soon took precedence over this earlier scheme. See Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Mornington, Oct. 31, 1799 (précis). All D. accomplished in the East Indies was the maintenance of an intermittent blockade of Dutch and Spanish ports which kept the route to China open.

purpose.<sup>1</sup> The adventures of the latter expedition, commanded by the gallant Sir Ralph Abercromby, who did not live to see the full results of his victory at Aboukir, are well known. There would seem to be no doubt that it was undermanned and that its success was made certain by the extraordinary blunders of General Menou, the French commander.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, the victories in Egypt are in no very real sense attributable to Dundas. In fact, the success of the venture was probably the greatest stroke of luck which he experienced throughout his entire career, for it rather effectively put a stop to any criticism of his management of the war. Lord Glenbervie wrote in his diary: 'Perhaps the chief praise is due to the wisdom and fairness of Dundas in forming and adhering to the plan of the Egyptian expedition',<sup>3</sup> and the King, who had been extremely averse to the project, drank a toast to the man 'who proposed and carried into execution the expedition to Egypt, for in my opinion, when a person has been perfectly in the wrong, the most just and honourable thing for him to do is to acknowledge it publicly'.<sup>4</sup>

Under the circumstances, Dundas probably wished such praise could have come his way earlier, for, when the news of the complete success of the expedition arrived in the summer of 1801, Pitt and his colleagues had already been out of office for several months. Although it seems certain beyond reasonable doubt that the King's refusal to sanction Catholic emancipation in Ireland was the real reason for the fall of the Pitt Ministry,<sup>5</sup> there is good reason for thinking that Dundas would himself have gone into retirement within a few months even if the Catholic question had not forced the issue in March. For two years Grenville

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, J. W., *British Army*, iv. 856-9. In Mel. MSS., Misc., Edwards, there is a dispatch of Dundas to Abercromby dated Dec. 23, 1800, which is clear, courteous, and not written in the blustering tone referred to by Sir John Fortescue.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fortescue, *op. cit.*, iv. 845-7.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, S. (Lord Glenbervie), *Diaries*, ed. Bickley, i. 264.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 233.

<sup>5</sup> See Rose, *Pitt*, on this topic.

had wielded an influence over Pitt which so disturbed Dundas that his relations with his chief were no longer cordial. At moments of irritation Pitt complained of his Scottish colleague's bad grammar,<sup>1</sup> and Dundas was equally caustic in regard to Grenville's unwise precipitancy in action.<sup>2</sup> In April 1800, dissension in the Cabinet had again reached such a pass that Dundas asked to be relieved of the management of the war.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Irish Question was a constant source of sorrow to him, even though he saw the necessity of the union with Great Britain after the rebellion of 1797-8. Union, needless to say, meant little to him without Catholic emancipation. It was in confident expectation that this would be granted that he delivered an able oration in Parliament, quoting *verbatim* from the speech of Lord Belhaven, who, a century before, had prophesied dire ruin from the union of Scotland and England, only to have his every prediction falsified by subsequent events.<sup>4</sup>

To such difficulties as these, others of a more personal nature were added which made resignation seem welcome. Dundas had never fully recovered from a throat infection which had laid him low in January 1797. Worn down as he was by anxiety about the war during the following months, it was not long before he noticed a peculiar noise in his chest which corresponded to the beat of his pulse. In 1800, he was told that any over-exertion might bring sudden death. Having long suspected the actual state of the case, he bore the news with his characteristic fortitude, as he was determined, by dismissing the matter from his mind, to cause no worry to his family and to go on with his usual manner of life.<sup>5</sup> He did, nevertheless, see the wisdom of withdrawing from some of his political activities.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS. 157, D. to Pitt, Apr. 11, 1800.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68; Lecky, *History of England*, viii. 359.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS. in possession of Lady Melville, D. to Sir Walter Farquhar (the great London physician), Jan. 1800.

For these reasons, he resigned the Treasurership of the Navy in June 1800,<sup>1</sup> and, in the following autumn, began to arrange for his retirement from the India Board at the end of the year.<sup>2</sup> As a token of their appreciation, the East India Company offered him an annuity of £2,000, and the house in Downing Street which had been built for his use as President of the Board of Control.<sup>3</sup> The house Dundas subsequently refused to accept as a gift because of his retirement from his other offices,<sup>4</sup> but he intimated to the Directors that he would accept the annuity if it were offered to his wife.<sup>5</sup> This was accordingly done, the purchase of the house being arranged out of the proceeds of the annuity. Dundas was, therefore, well on the road to retirement when the King, by refusing to accede to Pitt's wishes in regard to Ireland, precipitated a serious political crisis in February 1801.<sup>6</sup> At this juncture, the pleadings of Dundas were likewise of no avail, for, when he attempted to persuade the King that Catholic emancipation would not violate the Coronation Oath, the King said, 'None of your d——d Scotch metaphysics, Mr. Dundas',<sup>7</sup> and there was an end of the matter.

On March 14, 1801, a little more than eight years after he had assumed the direction of the war, Dundas resigned with the rest of Pitt's Cabinet. That the results which he achieved as a War Minister were not all that might be wished is not at all extraordinary. If it be asked why he did not realize that he was attempting too much, the answer lies not in any selfish obstinacy on his part, especially after 1797, but in the conviction of Pitt that he was the only man available for

<sup>1</sup> Haydn, J., *Book of Dignities*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> This is clear from his letters to Lord Mornington, Eskbank 'Grange'.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 703, Edwards. Correspondence *in re* the Downing Street house.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, D. to the Chairman of the Court of Directors, Mar. 29, 1801.

<sup>5</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 72. Anon., *Life of Lord Melville*, in the volume containing the Trial of Lord Melville, published in London, 1806.

<sup>6</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 436 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 74; Mackintosh, R. J., *Life of Sir James Mackintosh* i. 170.



the task in hand. No doubt there were many blunders, much inefficiency, much bickering in the Cabinet, and great lack of co-ordination between the various arms of the forces. In all this, he had his share, but he was not alone, and his blunders far more often arose from sheer ignorance of military matters than from stupidity, or folly, or conceit. Not being endowed with great capacities for imaginative statesmanship, he could not know that the French project for an invasion of England was to be a myth, that the main effort should have been made in Flanders or at Toulon, that the West Indies were no longer a decisive theatre of war, and that Napoleon was to change the face of Europe. In spheres of operations with which he was more familiar on the sea and in the East, he acquitted himself more than creditably. Of his management of naval policy, Sir Julian Corbett has this to say:

... Those who read his undaunted and well reasoned letters to Lord Spencer and especially [the letters] in which he protests against excessive concentration in Home Waters and against abandoning the Mediterranean, will feel that the man was not all heady miscalculation—that he had at least on occasion an eye for the great lines of a war and kept at any rate a stout heart that would not despair of his country.<sup>1</sup>

His colonial conquests, especially of the Cape and Ceylon, and his well-rewarded efforts to strengthen British interests in the Near East were solid achievements which would have redounded to the fame of any minister. As his coach bore him along towards Scotland in the summer of 1801, he could take satisfaction not only in these, but also in the achievements of the past ten years in India, which must now claim our attention.

<sup>1</sup> *Spencer Papers*, Navy Records Society, i, introduction, p. xvi.

## THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIA

1790-1801

FOR some years before the outbreak of war in Europe brought its overwhelming tasks, Dundas had been compelled to give more than the usual amount of his time to Indian affairs. The atmosphere of comparative calm and tranquillity which had followed the arrival of Lord Cornwallis and Sir Archibald Campbell at Calcutta and Madras lasted only so long as both men could remain at their posts. Sir Archibald's sudden departure from Madras under stress of ill-health on February 7, 1789, ushered in a new era of unrest and disturbance. At that moment, Dundas was already working in London to put into effect the plan, upon which he had already determined,<sup>1</sup> of appointing General William Medows, the able Governor of Bombay, to succeed Sir Archibald at Madras, but the Court of Directors made so stubborn an opposition to the project of sending another military man to Madras that Medows's appointment was not confirmed until July 7, 1789.<sup>2</sup> It was therefore impossible for Medows to learn of his promotion and take over his government until February 1790. In the meantime, the Madras Government perforce fell into the hands of Mr. John Hollond, the senior Councillor, who really ruled jointly with his brother Mr. Edward John Hollond, and appears to have brought back the régime of unbridled jobbery and corruption for which the southern Presidency had formerly been famous. So notorious were the misdeeds of both brothers that Lord Cornwallis lost no time in getting them sent back to England as soon as Medows had arrived.<sup>3</sup> Reports of their corrupt practices poured

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Medows, Aug. 6, 1789 (copy). See also *ibid.*, D. to Robt. Abercromby, Apr. 8, 1789 (copy); also Haydn, *Book of Dignities*, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, C., *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 64-7.

in upon Dundas, who thereupon had the India Board's solicitors draw up indictments against them, and wrote: 'A conviction of such criminals is most sincerely and devoutly to be wished.'<sup>1</sup> His own personal opinion of their intrigues may be found in a letter to Grenville where he later wrote:

You are aware enough of the general history of the Carnatic intrigues to know that these very transactions in which Sir James Cockburn appears to have lent his credit are the foundations of all that mischievous system which created so much wickedness and anarchy at Madras against which we have been constantly struggling, and the seeds of which I hope, are nearly, although not as yet quite destroyed.<sup>2</sup> In view of this correspondence it hardly seems likely that Dundas was himself deeply implicated in the disgraceful transactions respecting the Nawab of the Carnatic's debts. Unfortunately for the Government, the two Hollonds escaped to America before being brought to trial.<sup>3</sup>

Had the Hollonds solely concerned themselves with speculation, the prestige of the Madras Government might have been quickly re-established, but their weak and vacillating policy encouraged Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, to attack the Rajah of Travancore, a native prince whom the Company were bound by treaty to defend. Although the wily sultan had in all probability made this move with French approval, the Hollonds, mistakenly supposing that European troubles would divert the French from Indian affairs, underestimated its importance and refused to give active co-operation to Lord Cornwallis, who was bent upon opening hostilities as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup> There thus began the Second Mysore War, which occupied all the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Oakeley, Aug. 1, 1791 (copy). Concerning the Hollonds, see also *ibid.*, D. to Medows, May 11, 1790. *Ibid.*, lot 707, Edwards, Petrie to D., Aug. 4, 1790, transmits Madras indictments, and *ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Medows, Dec. 1, 1790, gives Board of Control's summary of charges.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 297, D. to Grenville, Aug. 5, 1792.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, C., *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 227.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', J. Hollond to D., Apr. 6, 1789 (*précis*).

energies of the British Indian governments for two years and effectively disposed of the large surplus accumulated as a result of the Governor-General's thrifty administration in Bengal. Under the direction of General Medows and Lord Cornwallis, who was rewarded with a marquise for his achievement, the British forces, assisted by those of their allies, the Nizam and the Mahrattas, succeeded in shutting Tippoo up in the citadel of Seringapatam, where he was compelled to make terms with his besiegers in the spring of 1792. On his agreement to pay a large indemnity and cede half his territories to be parcelled out to the Company, the Nizam, and the Mahrattas, peace was restored.

Although Dundas was full of praise for Lord Cornwallis's work as Governor-General and warmly defended the war in impassioned speeches before the House of Commons, he was not entirely satisfied with this settlement. Personally he would have preferred to have gone farther, captured Seringapatam, and crushed Tippoo for ever.<sup>1</sup> More keenly alive than Cornwallis to the dangers of French agitation in India, he had from the first regarded victory as of extreme importance for the future of the British possessions.<sup>2</sup> Soon after he learned that war had begun, he wrote to General Medows in December 1790:

I own I never look with very sanguine expectations to the continuance of peace in India while Tippoo lives. I cannot help being sanguine in the hopes of his being crushed by the confederacy which his own violence and perfidy has now brought upon him.<sup>3</sup>

In the following spring, his views on the importance of a successful termination of the war were more clearly set forth in a letter to Sir Charles Oakeley, whom he had appointed to take over the government of Madras while Medows was with the army. He then wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Oakley, Dec. 15, 1791 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.', Hippley to D., Apr. 2, 1788; James MacPherson to D., Apr. 4, 1788; Ramsay to D., July 14, 1788, and others. Also Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. ii. 11-12, D. to Grenville, Jan. 10, 1791.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Medows, Dec. 1, 1790.

The result of this war will determine whether we are to hold our situation as a precarious, at least, an expensive tenure or whether we may look for a long continuance of tranquillity. If the last is the termination of this contest, I shall not grudge the addition of a few millions to our debt.<sup>1</sup>

He therefore strongly endorsed Oakeley's virtual annexation of the territories of the Nawab of the Carnatic and the Rajah of Tanjore, and regretted that Lord Cornwallis contemplated the restoration of native control in these states at the end of the war.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, when the news arrived of the British failure to capture Seringapatam and dethrone Tippoo, Dundas was greatly disappointed.<sup>3</sup> He could not be enthusiastic about the plan for keeping the peace in India by creating a balance of power between Tippoo, the British, the Nizam, and the Mahrattas, but he kept his feelings to himself. What chiefly reconciled him to the result was the expense involved in a protracted war together with the certainty that the Company would oppose a vigorous Indian foreign policy.

The permanent settlement of the Bengal revenue, the other great achievement of Lord Cornwallis's administration in India, met with no criticism from Dundas. This 'land settlement', which is of first importance in the history of Anglo-Indian finance, was worked out in India by Sir John Shore of the Bengal Revenue Board and Lord Cornwallis. Although both were in agreement with regard to giving the *zemindars*, the former revenue collectors, what were virtually proprietary rights over the soil, they disagreed as to the length of time the 'settlement' ought to run. Shore favoured a decennial settlement, while Cornwallis thought the agreement should be permanent, and, as their work proceeded, Dundas received an ever increasing amount of correspondence on the subject.<sup>4</sup> To one of those who

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Oakeley, May 2, 1791 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Aug. 1, 1791.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Dec. 15, 1791 (copy), also D. to Petrie.

<sup>4</sup> On the 'land settlement', see, especially, Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii, ch. xv.

pressed for his opinion on so important a matter, he wrote with great good sense:

I am resolved to keep my mind perfectly open upon it till the whole materials shall arrive upon which the final judgment is to be formed. So far as a cursory reading goes, I am inclined to think that however amusing many of the researches may be as information for an antiquarian, they are not entirely applicable to the sound determination of the controversy. It is not a matter of great moment what the precise form or principle of collecting the revenues was under the Mogul Government. It is of more moment to ascertain what is the best mode of arranging the land-holdings of distant provinces for the object of a fair revenue compatible with the universal happiness and security of the Natives.<sup>1</sup>

When all the information Lord Cornwallis had collected arrived, Dundas and Pitt shut themselves up at Wimbledon for ten days in order to give their undivided attention to Indian business. After a careful and thorough perusal of the evidence, they endorsed a permanent settlement as recommended by Cornwallis. Although the settlement has been much criticized for making the *zemindars* virtual owners of the soil, it has never been suggested that Cornwallis acted from other than the highest motives. His view of the case was exactly what might have been expected of a man who was not familiar with any law of real property except that which prevailed in England and Ireland.

It was probably as a result of Lord Cornwallis's advice that Dundas kept in check his desire for greater control over the Court of Directors when the time came for the renewal of the Company's charter in 1793. In 1790, Cornwallis wrote at length on this subject.<sup>2</sup> Though he fully appreciated Dundas's irritation at the constant opposition which the Court of Directors made to the well-considered plans of the Board of Control, he was nevertheless of the opinion that the time had not arrived for a still further withdrawal of the Company

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Col. John Murray, May 15, 1790 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> See especially letter of Apr. 4, 1790, quoted in Seton-Karr, *op. cit.*, ch. iv.

from the political sphere. Much as he would have wished to increase the powers of the Board of Control, Dundas himself subsequently adopted this view and wrote to Sir Charles Oakeley in 1792 that he had no intention of changing a form of government which had worked well for eight years. 'I am more disposed', he said, 'to adhere to what has had the test of experience than to give way to the theories of speculative men'.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly he threw himself into the 'arduous task' of preparing and passing through Parliament a Bill renewing the Company's exclusive trading privileges for a period of twenty years.<sup>2</sup> This Act created the office of President of the Board of Control, granted salaries to the President and active members of the Board, and removed the former provision that the members of the Board must be Privy Councillors. The Act also provided for the distribution of the Company's surplus, authorized an increase of £1,000,000 in its capital, and made three thousand tons of Company shipping annually available for the use of private individuals. The purpose of this last clause was to enable Company officials to trade openly on their own account in British ships.<sup>3</sup>

More pressing during the years 1791 and 1792 than any matters concerning the renewal of the charter was the problem of selecting a new Governor-General. Some time before the conclusion of a definitive treaty with Tippoo, General Medows, by refusing the appointment tendered to him by Dundas with Pitt's approval, had completely upset the well-laid plans of the Board of Control for the succession to the Governor-Generalship.<sup>4</sup> Knowing that Cornwallis was deter-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Oakeley, Sept. 20, 1792 (copy). At this time, there was considerable agitation for the abolition of the E. I. Company's monopoly of the Indian trade.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Oakeley, May 16, 1793 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this Act, see Mill, *History of India*, vi. 2 ff.; and Robinson, F. B., *East India Company*, pp. 107-8. Before 1793, the Company had been powerless to prevent its own servants from trading clandestinely by means of American and other foreign ships. For a full description of clandestine trade, even by Directors themselves, see Mel. MSS., in my possession, Sir A. Campbell to D., Feb. 20, 1788 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> Haydn, *Book of Dignities*, p. 266.

mined to return home in 1793, Dundas was for some months at his wits' end. Neither he nor Pitt could think of a person not in the Company's service who was suited to the task, and Dundas now, apparently for the first time, entertained the idea of going out himself. As a last resort, he thought of begging Lord Cornwallis to stay on until the completion of the negotiations for the renewal of the charter would enable him to leave England, but he soon realized that this was out of the question.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the future might bring, an immediate choice was imperative in the autumn of 1792. The obvious way out was the appointment of the ablest of the Company's servants, and he and Pitt took it. Setting aside their unwritten rule against promoting civil servants to the highest posts in India, they appointed as Governor-General Sir John Shore, who was then on a visit to England in connexion with the land settlement of Bengal.

In justification of this step, it may be said that this was perhaps the one occasion upon which that excellent rule deserved to be suspended. Medows excepted, Shore was the only man with Indian experience who possessed the requisite ability for the Governor-Generalship. He had gone out to India in the days of Warren Hastings and had worked his way up through all grades of the Company's civil service to one of the highest posts in the Bengal Government. His honesty and integrity were vouched for by Lord Cornwallis. A civilian and a pronounced advocate of the Company's policy of peace and non-interference in the disputes of native powers, he was not to prove the best man for the leadership of Indian affairs while a great war was raging in Europe and the Indian princes were employing able European officers, chiefly French, trained by such men as M. De Boigne and M. Raymond,<sup>2</sup> but it

<sup>1</sup> Ross, C., *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 212-15.

<sup>2</sup> See Wheeler, J. T., *History of India*, ch. vii, for a short account. De Boigne served with Scindia, the leading Mahratta chieftain, and Raymond with the Nizam. Cf. Fortescue, J. W., *History of the British Army*, iv. 711-45.



was not known at the time of his appointment that he would have to face these conditions. Dundas and Pitt, much impressed by Shore's 'talents, industry, and candour',<sup>1</sup> saw no reason why they should not in this instance oblige the Company by appointing a man for whose nomination the Directors had been clamouring ever since 1786.<sup>2</sup> Cornwallis, himself, although he had written a long letter opposing the promotion of civil servants to governorships, expressed himself as tolerably satisfied with their decision, which had to be made before his letter arrived. To his mind, Shore was competent to succeed him, and Shore's conduct on arrival in India afforded him the 'greatest satisfaction' and induced him to hope that he would be able to admit him as an exception to his 'general rule' against the promotion of Company servants to governorships.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly in order to counteract Shore's deficiencies, Dundas sent out, as Governor of Madras, Lord Hobart, a man of very different stamp. Hobart, who was willing to accept an Indian governorship in the hope that thereby he might gain the means necessary to support his title, had shown vigour, determination, and administrative ability as Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.<sup>4</sup> A thorough soldier, he preferred conquest to compromise, and it was hardly to be expected that he would favour peace at any price. His appointment affords another example of Dundas's tolerance, for Hobart had exerted himself in Ireland to prevent any concessions to Roman Catholics.<sup>5</sup> Knowing that Shore's health was failing, Dundas promised Hobart the Governor-Generalship if his services at Madras were satisfactory,<sup>6</sup> and, shortly thereafter, gave him a useful ally in an equally able and intrepid Governor of

<sup>1</sup> Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 213.

<sup>2</sup> Haydn, *Book of Dignities*, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, C., *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 219. See also Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Aug. 29, 1796 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Sept. 29, 1793.

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., iv. 728.

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Aug. 29, 1796 (copy), and others.

Bombay, Jonathan Duncan, who was destined to govern that Presidency until 1811.<sup>1</sup> Duncan's appointment, one of the best that Dundas ever made, received high praise from Lord Cornwallis, who wrote to Shore in September 1794:

Mr. Dundas first mentioned to me on my arrival in England, his intention that Duncan should be Governor of Bombay, and you will easily conceive that, knowing as I did the importance of a good Government in our new acquisitions on the Malabar coast, I warmly encouraged and cultivated this favourable disposition in the Board of Control. A party, however, in the Court of Directors have hitherto contrived to defeat Mr. Dundas's plan, wishing I suppose to get a Governor who would be more attentive to their private recommendations and jobs, than to the measures that would be most likely to promote and secure the happiness of the inhabitants and the permanent interests of the Company and of Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

As soon as two men of such contrasting personalities as Sir John Shore and Lord Hobart took up their duties at Calcutta and Madras, an extraordinary situation arose. When Hobart favoured an alliance with the Nizam, who had come into conflict with the Mahrattas, Shore insisted on neutrality and non-intervention, which brought about the defeat of the Nizam at Kurdla in 1795 and the consequent discredit of British prestige throughout India.<sup>3</sup> When Hobart made treaties with the Nawab for the virtual annexation of the Carnatic and sent an embassy to the King of Candy in Ceylon, Shore disallowed the negotiations.<sup>4</sup> When Hobart wished to use force against a group of mutinous British officers in Bengal who had formed 'Committees of Correspondence' on the American model and hatched a plot to seize Fort William,<sup>5</sup> Shore insisted on a policy

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 696, Edwards, contains the Dundas-Duncan correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, ii. 264.

<sup>3</sup> Muir, R., *Making of British India*, p. 200. For Shore's explanation of this action, see Mel. MSS., lot 712, Edwards, Shore to D., Aug. 21, 1794, Feb. 7, 1795, May 12, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 712, Edwards, Shore to D., Aug. 26, 1795. *Ibid.*, lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Nov. 25, 1795, and others.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 696, Edwards, Duncan to D., Feb. 29, 1796.

of conciliation and compromise in settling the army disputes.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Shore's point of view on all these matters is best summed up in his remark that 'if Mr. Hastings had done what Lord Hobart has, it would have formed an article of his impeachment'.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, at intervals of five or six months after these events happened, Dundas was receiving 'most unpleasant' letters from India.<sup>3</sup> At first he counselled patience, wisdom, and moderation to both governors in the hope that Shore's health would speedily force him to retire,<sup>4</sup> but when Hobart's letters became more and more acrimonious, in 1795 and 1796, Dundas perceived that the only thing to do was to bring them both home. An impartial review of this controversy reveals right on both sides. Subsequent events were to show that Shore's foreign policy of non-intervention was a very grievous error which jeopardized the existence of the British Empire in India,<sup>5</sup> but, in pursuing such a policy, Shore was acting, as he thought, upon the principles of Cornwallis and the expressed wishes of the Company which he had served all his life. If his foreign policy is to be condemned, his settlement of the army disputes certainly deserves praise.<sup>6</sup> The correspondence of the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Governor of Bombay<sup>7</sup> gives little warrant for a belief that the adoption of Lord Hobart's plan of using loyal troops against the mutineers would have brought about a satisfactory settlement of these disputes. The question was one of extreme seriousness. As Sir Robert Abercromby, the Commander-in-Chief, said: 'If we lose this country, it will be from the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Nov. 25, 1795, June 13, 1796.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 712, Edwards, Shore to D., July 5, 1796.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Aug. 29, 1796.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Jan. 13, 1796.

<sup>5</sup> Wheeler, J. T., *History of India*, *passim*; Muir, R., *Making of British India*, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Shore's vigorous defence of the position the British had taken up in Oudh also deserves praise.

<sup>7</sup> Mel. MSS., lots 712, Edwards (Shore corr.), 694 (Abercromby corr.), and 696 (Duncan corr.).

disaffection of an ill-regulated army.'<sup>1</sup> In 1795, the 'French contagion' had spread widely among the European troops outside Calcutta and had even reached Bombay.<sup>2</sup> Under such circumstances, it was Sir John Shore's policy of issuing conciliatory addresses to the officers, promising redress of grievances, which kept their disaffection under control until a new army plan drawn up by Lord Cornwallis arrived from England.<sup>3</sup> Even then, Shore suspended parts of the plan which he knew would be displeasing to the officers.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these measures, the loyalty of the army had been re-established by 1797.<sup>5</sup>

Although there was nothing intrinsically wrong with the policies which Lord Hobart pursued at Madras, the letters which he wrote home after being a year in India proved him entirely unfit for the greater responsibilities of the Governor-Generalship.<sup>6</sup> No sooner had it become apparent that Shore had no intention of resigning than Hobart took occasion to remind Dundas in almost every letter of his wish to succeed Shore. As the months went by, the letters became more and more ill-tempered. On one occasion Hobart produced a veritable philippic against Shore which condemned every act of the Supreme Government at Calcutta. Indeed, his language often leads one to the conclusion that the death of his wife and infant son had slightly affected his mind.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile other letters complaining of Hobart's ungovernable temper and unjustifiable violence in dealing with native princes were coming to

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 694, Edwards, Abercromby to D., Jan. 14, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 696, Edwards, Duncan to D., Jan. 16, 1796. In this letter Duncan wrote: 'In short, all the Presidencies at present are mere governments upon sufferance under no small difficulty to serve their credit and maintain their power.'

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Oct. 15, 1795, sends the army plan. There is also at Eskbank 'Grange' a bound volume containing Cornwallis's long letter to Dundas of Nov. 7, 1794, on the Indian Army.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 712, Edwards, Shore to D., July 5, 1796.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 696, Edwards, Shore to Duncan, Feb. 26, 1796; lot 712, Shore to D., Jan. 10, 1797, describes his policy in some detail.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Aug. 29, 1796.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Sept. 10, 1795; Nov. 21, 1795; Dec. 4, 1795; Aug. 16, 1796; Oct. 1, 1796; Dec. 16, 1796.

Dundas from subordinate officials.<sup>1</sup> In this state of affairs, all Dundas could do was to pour oil on the troubled waters while he cast about for a new Governor-General and a new Governor of Madras.<sup>2</sup>

As we have hitherto observed, Dundas, at this serious juncture in Indian affairs in the winter of 1796-7, made up his mind to send Lord Cornwallis back to India or to go himself in case of Cornwallis's refusal.<sup>3</sup> The news of the reappointment of Cornwallis, who would probably have been glad to decline if Pitt had been willing for Dundas to go in his stead, gave satisfaction to both Shore and Hobart.<sup>4</sup> They had no opportunity to feel ill used, for they could have no possible objection to Cornwallis, the mere mention of whose name helped to bring tranquillity to India. Consequently, it was a great shock to them, and especially to Hobart, to learn in the following winter of 1797-8 that, because of the need of Cornwallis's services in Ireland, Lord Mornington (later Marquess Wellesley) had been appointed to India. Hobart, who wished the Governor-Generalship or nothing, was thoroughly incensed. 'It is', he wrote later to Dundas, 'impossible for me to admit that there was just cause for Lord Mornington's appointment.'<sup>5</sup> In spite of this and other similar letters, Dundas and Pitt did everything in their power to appease Lord Hobart.<sup>6</sup> Even though Dundas thought Hobart unfit for the Governor-Generalship, he yielded to no one in his recognition of the great services which Hobart had rendered to the Empire, in India, and especially in Ceylon. On this subject, Dundas wrote to Pitt early in 1797:

... Justice must so far be done to him [Lord Hobart] as to admit that with the exception of the story of Mr. Adderley

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 694, Abercromby to D., Nov. 4, 1795. Also letters from Madras servants criticizing Hobart's behaviour towards the Nawab of the Carnatic.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Hobart, Aug. 29, 1796, and later letters.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., June 23, 1797.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Aug. 28, 1799.

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 707, Edwards, contains a clipping from the *Madras Gazette* of June 8, 1799, in which this topic is discussed.

[Hobart's secretary?] and some intemperance in his conduct to the Nabob and Rajah of Tanjore, he has done his business extremely well, and I really feel that to his energy and exertion we are indebted for our brilliant success in the East.<sup>1</sup>

As events were to prove, the appointment of Mornington, who had been selected to accompany Cornwallis as Governor of Madras and had been for three years a member of the Board of Control, was one of the wisest that could have been made. Arriving in India in the nick of time to deal with the menacing situation arising out of the French conquest of Egypt, he brought about the complete overthrow of Tippoo Sultan, who was killed when the British stormed Seringapatam in May 1799. His subsequent policy of annexation and of control over native princes consolidated British power on a permanent basis during the years 1799-1804. To him, Dundas, who was not slow to recognize intellectual ability and administrative talents of so superior an order, gave the same confidence which he gave to Cornwallis. Although Mornington's measures were largely of his own choosing, Dundas and he exchanged private letters in a very friendly spirit as long as Dundas remained at the India Board.<sup>2</sup> Dundas's secret dispatches to Mornington reveal more fully than any other available portion of his India correspondence the care and attention which he bestowed on every aspect of Indian affairs.<sup>3</sup> In them Dundas discussed not only foreign policy and high finance, but such relatively unimportant topics as the establishment of a university at Calcutta, on which subject he made the following highly characteristic remarks:

The principal objection to a collegiate institution in India arises from the probability that such an assemblage of literary

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS., 157, D. to Pitt, Jan. 29, 1797 (orig.).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 701, Edwards, précis, and copies of Mornington-Dundas private letters.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', bound MSS., vol. of précis of all the Dundas-Mornington letters.

and philosophical men would indulge themselves in political speculations and thus degenerate into a school of jacobinism which, in India, would be the Devil.<sup>1</sup>

On foreign policy he was even more uncompromising than the Governor-General himself, for he wished to abolish 'double government'<sup>2</sup> in Oudh, Arcot, Tanjore, and Tippoo's dominions. Lacking personal knowledge of India, Dundas became over-enthusiastic on this point, after the death of Tippoo, for he then advocated the 'annexation of Mysore to the Crown of Great Britain as a valuable and efficient possession binding together our territories on both coasts'.<sup>3</sup> In order to consummate this plan, he thought that 'Bombay ought to remain a full military station and all our other establishments on both coasts (including Madras and Ceylon) ought to be stations dependent on the government established at Seringapatam where the great central army ought to be'.<sup>4</sup> Lord Mornington's next letters brought Dundas a realization of the impracticability of these suggestions and he at once wrote out his full approval of the restoration of the ancient Hindu dynasty in Mysore under British tutelage.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to Ceylon, Dundas had not at this time formulated a definite and permanent policy. Shortly after the conquest he had wished to have the island under direct Crown control, but Lord Hobart had insisted on governing it from Madras on the ground that it had been conquered by Company troops.<sup>6</sup> Since Hobart was warmly supported by the Directors, Dundas thought it wise not to interfere. It was not until the Resident sent from Madras had precipitated a rebellion in 1797 by attempting to introduce an English system of finance and taxation that Dundas

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Mornington, Sept. 9, 1800 (précis).

<sup>2</sup> 'Double government' meant joint control with the native ruler.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Mornington, Oct. 9, 1799 (précis). Dundas also wished to annex the Portuguese possessions, Goa and Diu.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Mornington, Nov. 1, 1799 (précis).

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 708, Edwards, Hobart to D., Feb. 20, 1796. See also *Cleghorn Papers*, p. 286.

transferred the colony to the Crown and sent out Frederick North as the first Governor of Ceylon.<sup>1</sup> Even then Dundas was afraid that North, although instructed to obey the Governor-General on all matters of high policy in India, would be too independent. Further investigation of the question, however, appears to have convinced him that Ceylon should never be attached to an Indian Presidency.<sup>2</sup> In his last year at the Board of Control, we find him building up a separate and distinct Ceylon Civil Service in which the appointments were made by the Governor on the spot, and not through favouritism from home.<sup>3</sup> Frederick North, in spite of an irascible temper, was an able and just Governor. The passage from his correspondence in which he described his judicial reforms to Dundas is specially noteworthy:

... My new English Judges are considered by the people in the provinces as their saviours and Protectors. They are going on admirably. No appeals are lodged against their decisions and they settle almost all the cases which come before them *in limine* by stating them to the parties and persuading them to agree.<sup>4</sup>

Dundas's solicitude for the good government of India is best shown by an incident which took place in the last year of his administration of Indian affairs. On March 6, 1800, he received an extraordinary letter from one Charles Crauford, who had recently married the Duchess of Newcastle.<sup>5</sup> This gentleman announced that, as stepfather of the young Duke of Newcastle, who was still a minor, he controlled at least seven seats in Parliament, the largest number controlled by any one individual. He then continued:

<sup>1</sup> *Cleghorn Papers*, pp. 286 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Mornington, Sept. 11, 1800 (précis); Dec. 12, 1800 (précis). Dundas saw that Ceylon could not afford to be governed by the least able of the Madras civil servants.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 703, Edwards, J. Tolfrey (Ceylon civil servant) to D., Aug. 26, 1808.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., North Corr., N.L.S., North to D., dated Colombo, Nov. 29, 1802.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 750, N.L.S., Chas. Crauford to D., Mar. 5, 1800.



... I am perfectly ready to place the whole of this influence at the service of the present administration. On the other hand I am sure you will not think it unreasonable that I should look to something considerable for my family. I therefore trust, Sir, that you will excuse my stating without further preface that my great object is to put forward the head of my family, my eldest brother, Sir James Crauford, and to procure for him the Governor-Generalship of India to succeed Lord Mornington.<sup>1</sup>

On the eighth, Dundas replied from Wimbledon:

Sir,

I have the honour of your letter of the 5th. I am sorry you should have had the trouble of entering unnecessarily into a detail of particulars which it is impossible for me to take under consideration with the view in which you state them. I hold my duty to His Majesty and to the Publick to be of a nature too sacred to be connected with any other consideration in the Choice of a Governor-General of India than what is strictly applicable to the subject itself. If, when a vacancy happens in that important station, it shall be proved to me that your brother was the proper person to succeed to it, he should have my decided wishes in his favour, regardless of any political weight that could be adduced against him, and, upon the same principles no political interest I hope, will ever be permitted to operate in his favour. I trust the proofs I have given to the world of the sincerity of those feelings will relieve me from any suspicion of acting with disrespect to your wishes, or from any other motives than those I have distinctly specified.

I have the honour to be, etc.,

Henry Dundas.<sup>2</sup>

There is no better proof than this of the high sense of responsibility by which Dundas was guided in the choice of men to fill the most important posts in India. It must have given him great satisfaction to have had this opportunity of expressing his devotion to the best interests of British India in the last year of his service as President of the Board of Control.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 750, N.L.S., D. to Chas. Crauford, Mar. 8, 1800 (copy).

## VI

### LAST YEARS: IMPEACHMENT 1801-11

ALTHOUGH Dundas took great enjoyment in rural solitude and in freedom from all cares of office, he made it apparent within a few months of his retirement that he had no intention of losing touch with national politics. The host of his political adherents would indeed have felt that the world was coming to an end had he done so. Lord Brougham has described the consternation in Scotland at the news of his resignation.<sup>1</sup> During the summer of 1801, his former habit of gloomy and melancholy reflection came upon him, and his mind was not set at ease by the publication of the peace terms in October. His chief consolation, he wrote to Grenville, was his conviction that he would not live to witness the disastrous results of such a bargain.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of his horror at the surrender of the Cape and Malta, he did not propose to appear in Parliament and offend the Addington Government by denouncing the peace. As usual, he pursued the *via media*. So long as his position as political manager of Scotland was undisturbed, he did nothing which would estrange him from the new Prime Minister. In view of his obvious intention of giving as little offence as possible to Addington, his threats of permanent retirement from all connexion with politics at this time can hardly be taken seriously.<sup>3</sup>

By his work on behalf of the Government during the election campaign of 1802,<sup>4</sup> Dundas put Addington under such obligations to him that the Prime Minister could not have refused him a peerage even had he wished to do so. As it was, the peerage may well have been spontaneously offered by Addington, who knew that it would not be unacceptable. The Prime

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 76; Brougham, *Sketches of British Statesmen*, i. 309.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. vii. 57, D. to Grenville, Oct. 10, 1801.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> *Infra*, p. 277.

Minister was probably aware that when times were hardest in the last years of the Pitt Ministry, Dundas had often contemplated a peerage as a just reward of his labours.<sup>1</sup> He was not the type of man to whom the external prestige and trappings of lordship were unwelcome or irritating. It was probably with a feeling of great satisfaction and contentment that Dundas in December 1802 became 'Viscount Melville of Melville in the county of Edinburgh and Baron Dunira of Dunira in the County of Perth'.<sup>2</sup>

Three months after his elevation to the House of Lords, Dundas allowed Addington to persuade him to negotiate with Pitt for the formation of a new ministry. In many ways this was a most extraordinary proceeding. Pitt had been much hurt at Dundas's acceptance of a peerage. 'I have not', said Pitt, 'heard one syllable from him on the subject since we parted in the summer; indeed, I have had no letter from him for some months. But what is most extraordinary, Dundas, when I last saw him, stated to me a variety of reasons why it was impossible for him to accept a peerage.'<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the scheme proposed was hardly one which would commend itself to Pitt, who had always insisted on being head of the Government. In brief Pitt, Dundas, and Addington were to serve under a third person, preferably Lord Chatham, who would be the nominal Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup> How Dundas can have thought that Pitt would welcome such proposals almost passes comprehension. The sequel was what might have been expected. Dundas, having dined at Walmer Castle on March 20, 1803, broached the subject as he and Pitt sipped their port. He had no sooner led up to it than Pitt cut him short. 'Really', said Pitt to Wilber-

<sup>1</sup> *Diaries of Sylvester Douglas, Lord Glenbervie*, ed. Bickley, i. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Shortly before Dundas got his peerage, the Marquess of Buckingham wrote Lord Grenville that, in any proposed new Cabinet, the ministers ought to include Dundas, 'because of the influence and assistance which he brings to government, particularly in the Indian Department'. Buckingham thought the failure of the war 'fairly imputable' to Dundas.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Stanhope, P. H., *Life of Pitt*, iii. 427.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

force afterwards, 'I had not the curiosity to ask what I was to be.' On the next day, Pitt was more willing to discuss the matter, but gave a decided negative.<sup>1</sup>

The opportunity for overturning the Addington Government did not come until the following year. The renewal of the war with Napoleon in May 1803 had involved Addington in a sea of difficulties, but he struggled on into the winter, valiantly attempting to check the military and naval inefficiency which was losing him the confidence of the public. As the spring of 1804 approached, all the political groups, which acted with him only because of necessity, were seeking a pretext on which they might successfully attack the Government. The confusion became worse confounded in mid-February, when the King suffered a slight attack of insanity. As in 1788-9, the friends of the Prince of Wales, of whom the most prominent were Fox and Lord Moira (later Marquess of Hastings), began to have sanguine hopes of a Regency. The instability of the Government was revealed on the 15th of March, when Pitt moved for papers on the naval preparation and lost by only seventy-two votes.<sup>2</sup>

In the ensuing negotiations for the formation of a new ministry, Dundas took a prominent part. Towards the end of March, Pitt had already determined to do his utmost to force Addington's resignation at the earliest opportunity. He held conversations with Lord Eldon and wrote to Dundas to interview Lord Moira, then Commander-in-Chief in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, on March 22, Dundas, at Dunira, had been apprised of Lord Moira's views by Charles Hope, the Lord Advocate.<sup>4</sup> In his talk with Hope, Lord Moira had given the impression that the King was far more ill than the public thought and that the Prince of Wales

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 79; Wilberforce, R. and S., *Life of Wilberforce*, iii. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Stanhope, P. H., *Secret Correspondence connected with Mr. Pitt's Return to Office*, p. 4. This book was printed but not published, and is in the British Museum.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS., 157, D. to Pitt, Mar. 24, 1804 (original).

<sup>4</sup> Stanhope, P. H., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

would consent to the formation of a broad-bottomed administration in which Mr. Pitt should be 'subordinate' to no one.<sup>1</sup> Dundas conveyed this information to Pitt and promised to go to Edinburgh for a talk with Lord Moira, even though he thought such an interview would be 'awkward'.<sup>2</sup>

On receiving Dundas's letters, Pitt wrote to him at once that Lord Moira's reports of the King's increasing illness were inaccurate. After reminding Dundas that he could put no great confidence in anything the Prince of Wales might say, Pitt expressed his willingness to form a coalition ministry with himself at its head, but he felt that it would not be right to force upon the King persons to whom the King had a notorious antipathy. Since it was very probable that the King's mind would become clearer, Pitt preferred the plan of overthrowing the Addingtonites in the House of Commons at the end of April. That accomplished, he would form a broad Government if he could or a narrow Government if he must. For the purpose of the attack on Addington, he was anxious for the support of the Scottish members of the House. In conclusion, he wrote:

. . . If, in addition to [my own friends] we procure, as I think probable some considerable strength from Ireland and if upon what I have stated you think it possible to collect a larger proportion of our friends from your part of the world, I entertain very little doubt that the success of our effort would be nearly certain.<sup>3</sup>

In reply, Dundas, who was not so careful of the King's feelings, promised the certain support of at least twenty-six Scottish members<sup>4</sup> and expressed the conviction that 'nothing can bring the country out of all its difficulties and place it perhaps on a higher eminence than ever, except a suspension of all political

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Hope to D., Mar. 22, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS., 157, D. to Pitt, Mar. 24, 1804.

<sup>3</sup> Stanhope, P. H., *op. cit.*, p. 10, Pitt to D., Mar. 29, 1804.

<sup>4</sup> Rose, *Pitt*, ii. 498, D. to Pitt, Apr. 4, 1804.

animosities; and the collection of all the talents, vigour, and experience of the country in one general mass of energy and action'.<sup>1</sup> For this reason Dundas urged that Pitt, if forced to form a narrow Government, should give Fox and Grenville assurance that their parties would be brought into the Government the moment the King could be persuaded to accept them. This, indeed, was a remote possibility, but Dundas thought Fox and his friends would be satisfied because of the apparent imminence of the King's death or complete insanity. Within a few days Dundas returned to Edinburgh and had a rather unsatisfactory interview with Lord Moira, which left matters very much as they were.<sup>2</sup>

To Dundas's suggestion in these letters, Pitt replied on April 11, 1804, when the King was already well on the road to recovery. In regard to Fox and Grenville Pitt wrote:

. . . I perfectly agree in the sentiments you express . . . respecting the propriety of a full explanation of future intentions to Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox, in the event of being obliged to form a narrow Government; and enough has been said already (to one directly and, through pretty certain channels to the other) to prepare them for receiving it.<sup>3</sup>

Pitt then outlined his plan of parliamentary attack and asked Dundas to hasten the departure of the Scottish members who were still in Scotland. In case of failure, Pitt proposed to return to Walmer Castle to await a General Election in the summer.<sup>4</sup> Within five days the Government's majority was cut to 21 in the vote on the Irish Militia Bill.<sup>5</sup> Pitt was then sure of victory within a fortnight, and wrote to Dundas:

. . . While the discussion was likely to be confined to the House of Commons, any object there might perhaps be gained by the appearance of the recruits you had sent us, but, in the House of Lords, your presence will be highly material.

<sup>1</sup> Stanhope, P. H., *op. cit.*, p. 17, D. to Pitt, Apr. 3, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Pitt, Apr. 6, 1804.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27, Pitt to D., Apr. 11, 1804.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Independent, however, of all questions of Parliamentary strength, I am for still stronger reasons most anxious for your presence. It is not only in the event of my being compelled to make a narrow Government that I should feel your assistance indispensable, but even if we succeed in forming one as strong and comprehensive as we would wish, I see no possible reason (public or private) why you should not return to a seat in the Cabinet with the Board of Control, and the management of Scotland. Neither of these can be a burden to you or interfere with your plans of health and comfort, for a large part of the year. In short, on every account, I am most anxious to have you on the spot, and earnestly beg you, if possible, to set out immediately.<sup>1</sup>

These paragraphs prove rather conclusively that the breach between Pitt and Dundas which had been so apparent two years before was being speedily healed.

As a result of Pitt's attacks, which again cut the Government majority to less than 50, Addington announced his determination to resign on April 29, but nothing had occurred which made the formation of a coalition Government possible. The King's mind had recovered sufficiently to grasp the objectionable qualities of Fox and his friends, but the dangers to the state and the impending Napoleonic invasion from Boulogne made no impression upon it. Never had the extraordinary invalid so baffled his ministers. He lamented Pitt's dislike of Addington, he reverted to the old controversy over the Catholic question, he took Pitt to task for 'permitting himself to be influenced by two Secretaries of State, one of whom [meaning Dundas] had entered into a correspondence with the Roman Catholics and had adopted all the wild opinions of Mr. Burke, and the other [meaning Lord Grenville] was guided by obstinacy, his usual director'.<sup>2</sup> Fox, he would not under any circumstances appoint, and Grenville would not enter the Cabinet on such terms. Neither he nor Fox was at all satisfied with the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33, Pitt to D., Apr. 18, 1804. See also Mel. MSS., Fam. Alb., D.'s wife to D., Apr. 19, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm. (1923), Bathurst MSS., p. 37, extract of the King's views, May 5, 1804.

turn of events or at all willing to trust to Pitt's intentions of including him at the earliest opportunity. To the last, Dundas wished for a coalition and favoured an appeal to the Earl of Moira,<sup>1</sup> but Pitt insisted upon the impossibility of any but a narrow administration. Accordingly, the new Government, including Pitt as Prime Minister and Dundas as First Lord of the Admiralty, took office on May 11, 1804.

Dundas's services to the Navy during his year as First Lord have probably been exaggerated,<sup>2</sup> but there seems to be no doubt that he made changes and improvements in naval service of first-class importance. Although Pitt's criticisms of the administration of Lord St. Vincent,<sup>3</sup> Dundas's predecessor, are in the main not justifiable, it appears that St. Vincent left an insufficient number of ships-of-the-line fit for service at a time when there was a real threat of Napoleonic invasion.<sup>4</sup> Dundas quickly set to work with his accustomed energy to remedy this situation. He wrote to the admirals that his business was, as 'equally' as he could, to distribute the naval patronage of the country.<sup>5</sup> He bent his energies towards the building of ships by giving large orders to the private yards, and by buying materials to put the Government yards on an efficient basis. Within a year he was able to announce in the House of Lords that there were 168 naval vessels in service which had not existed on his accession to office in 1804.<sup>6</sup>

To many of his contemporaries, who could not know that his political control in Scotland was waning,

<sup>1</sup> Stanhope, P. H., *op. cit.*, p. 50, Pitt to D., May 10, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wood's MSS. Life. Also, the naval veterans evinced no great enthusiasm in contributing money to the Melville Monument in Edinburgh. See *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, xv (1927). For an account of Dundas's vacillating policy in regard to an attack on Brest with fire-ships, see Cornwallis-West, *Life of Admiral Cornwallis*, chs. vii, viii, and ix, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Stanhope, *op. cit.*, p. 10, Pitt to D., Mar. 29, 1804.

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 80; Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, iv. 272. For an examination of the justice of Pitt's attack on St. Vincent, see *Letters of Lord St. Vincent*, edited for the Navy Records Society.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., Naval Miscellaneous, Edwards, D. to Sir John Colpoys and others, 1804.

<sup>6</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 81; Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, iv. 272.



Dundas must have seemed still at the height of his power as First Lord of the Admiralty under Pitt in 1805. His downfall in the spring of that year was sudden and dramatic. Early in the year, rumours began to get abroad in Government circles that the recently-appointed Commissioners of Naval Enquiry were uncovering a state of affairs in the office of the Treasurer of the Navy which did not redound to Dundas's credit. These Commissioners published their tenth report in February. Wilberforce, who happened to be calling upon Pitt when the first copy of the report was brought in, was astonished to see the Prime Minister seize the document with avidity and eagerly look into the leaves without waiting to cut them open.<sup>1</sup> Within two days, Dundas's enemies were agreeing with Fox that 'the character of Lord Melville [Dundas] was completely destroyed in public estimation for ever',<sup>2</sup> and Dundas's friends were shaking their heads in wonder and bewilderment. In Scotland there was consternation and despair. The report showed that Alexander Trotter of Dreghorn, the Paymaster of the Navy, had constantly speculated with the public money by placing it to his own account at Coutts's Bank. In 1795 he had even drawn the staggering sum of £1,000,000 from the Bank of England and placed it at Coutts's. The Commissioners admitted that Trotter's use of the public money in private speculation had occasioned no actual loss to the Government. Trotter was uniformly successful and paid all his Navy accounts. The Commissioners were also aware that the office of Treasurer of the Navy was in effect a sinecure office, the treasurer having practically nothing to do with the business except to confer with the paymaster occasionally. They did, however, implicate Dundas on three grounds: first, that by refusing to answer questions he had shielded Trotter; second, that he had borrowed money from Trotter which was in all probability

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, p. 83; Wilberforce, R. and S., *Life of Wilberforce*, iii. 217-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

public money; and finally, that he had occasionally diverted funds specifically appropriated for the Navy to other public services.<sup>1</sup>

All Dundas's personal and political enemies at once began to clamour for a searching investigation of his conduct. Dundas, who had jokingly remarked during the Hastings debates that he was glad *he* was not going to be impeached, must soon have realized that he was facing that same ordeal. To Hastings, still firm in his belief that Dundas had jealously plotted against him, the event must have seemed a stroke of retributive justice. Unfortunately we are unable to follow the history of Dundas's impeachment in full detail, because all of Dundas's papers for these years were either destroyed at the time or have not yet come to light.<sup>2</sup> The best that can be done is to reconstruct the general outlines of the case from the accounts and opinions of others.

When the storm broke, Dundas discovered that the number of his political enemies had vastly increased since the days of the first Pitt ministry. As Lady Bessborough said, 'All London rang with the Tenth Report'.<sup>3</sup> Not only the extreme Whigs rejoiced at the opportunity to abuse Dundas, but many notable figures who had formerly been closely connected with Pitt deserted him. Addington (Lord Sidmouth) was angered by Dundas's vote of 'no confidence' shortly after Dundas had received a peerage from him. Windham rejoiced openly and wrote as early as March 9:

. . . One can never regret for long together at the termination of power raised by such means as his and employed in such a way. It is a severe reverse but a most merited one and absolutely necessary if the Government and Parliament were to hope to retain any character. It is a separate piece of good fortune that the Admiralty is to be taken out of hands that would soon have given us a Scotch Navy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry 1805, passim.*

<sup>2</sup> See Preface.

<sup>3</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower, *Correspondence*, ii. 42, Lady Bessborough to G. L.-G., Mar. 21, 1805.

<sup>4</sup> *Windham Papers*, ii. 252, W. to Capt. Lukin, Mar. 9, 1805.

Wilberforce was from the first inclined to doubt Dundas's innocence. Grenville, though equally estranged, abstained from countenancing the attack on Dundas in Parliament. He nevertheless regarded Dundas's conduct very unfavourably. Writing to Lord Wellesley a year later he said:

I must say that if there be one individual in this country to whom I conceive myself to have shown the greatest kindness and that too with much embarrassment and difficulty, that individual is Lord Melville [Dundas].<sup>1</sup>

During March 1805, George III himself is said to have asked every one excitedly: 'Have you seen the Tenth Report? The Tenth Report?'<sup>2</sup> The royal presence at a play called *The Wheel of Fortune* could not suppress the uproarious applause which greeted an old colonial governor's remark that he could not give his daughter a portion because he had never understood the arts of governing. From King to lowliest subject the Tenth Report made itself felt, and in due course even came to the attention of Napoleon, who wrote to Barbé-Marbois:

. . . Faites faire un petit pamphlet sur l'affaire Melville pour montrer l'immoralité de M. Pitt et du gouvernement Anglais. Un écrit bien frappé la rendra évidente à tout le monde, et l'immoralité des chefs n'est point indifférente pour leur crédit.<sup>3</sup>

The leader of the attack on Dundas in the House of Commons was Samuel Whitbread, son of a self-made Nonconformist brewer. At Eton, young Whitbread had become acquainted with Charles Grey, afterwards second Earl Grey, and had married his sister. Inclined to be vain and headstrong, and somewhat conceited because of his sudden rise into the 'governing class', Whitbread welcomed the opportunity to abuse a noble lord in public. His speeches were not free from venomous partisan bias and his attitude toward

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm. (1912), Dropmore MSS. viii. 387, Grenville to Wellesley, Oct. 16, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 86; Campbell, John, *Life of Lord Campbell*, i. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Whibley, Charles, *Pitt*, p. 293, n.

Dundas, especially during the early stages of the investigation, was almost never one of judicial restraint. The evidence which he and his friends had at hand in the Tenth Report was not conclusive save on the one point that Dundas had permitted some of the Navy money to be diverted to other public services. On June 30, 1804, Dundas had written to the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry that, as he was in the habit of going over his old papers and destroying some,<sup>1</sup> he could not furnish them with the complete accounts for which they asked. He assured them that he had transferred the whole existing balance to the account of his successor as Treasurer of the Navy. In conclusion, he said:

. . . [At that time] I held other very confidential situations in Government and was intimately connected with others. I did not decline giving occasional accommodation from the funds in the Treasurer's hands to other services.<sup>2</sup>

The details of these transactions he could not reveal without betraying Government negotiations of a most secret and confidential character. Whitbread and his friends considered this mere evasion. They charged that Dundas had used these sums for private profit and pointed out the tenacity and persistence with which Dundas, overwhelmed with work, had clung to the Treasurership of the Navy.<sup>3</sup> The *Report* had shown that, while Dundas had assisted in passing the Act of 1785 raising the Treasurer's salary from £2,000 to £4,000 and abolishing the bulk of the fees and perquisites formerly paid to the Treasurer, he had not originated this reform, since the plan of raising salary and abolishing fees dated from before his treasurership.<sup>4</sup> In regard to Dundas's money transactions with Trotter, the *Report* did not give Dundas's enemies much to go upon. They could not prove that any large sums were

<sup>1</sup> From the appearance of the Mel. MSS., this appears to be very true. They are very scanty for the 1770's and 80's, and even where they are fuller for the 1790's, there is not a line about the office of the Treasurer of the Navy.

<sup>2</sup> *Tenth Report*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 85; Colchester, Lord, *Correspondence*, ii. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Tenth Report*.

involved. No total higher than £30,000 was mentioned throughout the investigation. Neither could they prove that Dundas knowingly used public money for his private profit. It was quite true, as Dundas said after the investigation had revealed the extent of Trotter's speculations, that from the way in which Trotter mixed public money in his private accounts there was no knowing how the small sums which he had borrowed and repaid had been made up. The most damaging admission which Dundas made was that he had permitted Trotter to lodge sums of public money which were needed for current payment at Coutts's Bank temporarily. This, however, did not give Whitbread much satisfaction. Dundas held that this was no violation of the statute which required the money to be in the Bank of England, for he had insisted that the sums be entered at Coutts's under their proper heads of service, Coutts's to be used as a hold-over depositary only, to facilitate payments and to protect the money needed for current payments.<sup>1</sup>

Although this evidence was inconclusive on many points and did not show that Dundas had been privy to Trotter's widespread speculations, it was quite sufficient to justify Whitbread in announcing, through Lord Grey, that he would bring the matter formally before the House of Commons on April 8, 1805.<sup>2</sup> At this juncture, Addington (Lord Sidmouth) proposed that Dundas should at once resign, and there were many others who urged Pitt to abandon Dundas. Pitt refused to do so. Even though his friendship for Dundas was not so warm as it had formerly been, he would not consent to abandon the man on whom he had depended in times of greatest stress. Wilberforce attributed Pitt's conduct to 'that false principle of honour' which was his great fault.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, honour played its part, but, aside from that, Pitt believed that Dundas had not

<sup>1</sup> *Tenth Report, passim*. The Navy Pay Office had been moved before 1782 from Broad Street, near the Bank of England, to Somerset Place.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87; Wilberforce, R. and S., *Life of Wilberforce*, iii. 218-20.

pocketed any public money. He had as the head of the Government been intimately concerned in these transactions which Dundas refused to reveal as 'secret and confidential'. He knew Dundas far better than any other Englishman. His close association with him for many years made him the best judge of his character. In all that time, he had never found Dundas eager for monetary reward and private profit. He knew his friend a generous and careless man about his private affairs. He knew intimately of the pressure of public business which gave Dundas no time whatever to look closely into the administration of the Navy Pay Office. One hundred and thirty-four million pounds had passed through that office during the years 1783-1800. If Dundas had been disposed to peculate, it would not have been for any twenty or thirty thousand pounds. Pitt felt that Dundas had been culpably lax in overseeing Trotter's accounts, but he never believed that he had wilfully defrauded the public. For these reasons, Pitt stood his ground against all those who pleaded with him to save himself by leaving Dundas to his fate.<sup>1</sup>

When, on April 8, 1805, Whitbread moved a series of eleven resolutions severely censuring Dundas, Pitt asked for the appointment of a Select Committee to investigate each charge. There then occurred one of the most dramatic scenes in the history of the House. The debate was long and acrimonious. Fox delivered a fiery invective, in which he declared that he would be ashamed if he belonged to the same class of society with Dundas. As the debate drew to a close, Pitt looked anxiously at Wilberforce, well knowing that the decision of the great Evangelical reformer and advocate of the abolition of slavery would have great weight with the House. Although he knew and sympathized with Pitt's anxiety, Wilberforce could not bring himself to advise leniency for Dundas. His speech, delivered in the early morning, was a plea for the passage of Whit-

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

bread's resolutions of censure. To his mind, Dundas's conduct was worthy of the strongest condemnation. Soon after he had finished speaking the House divided. When the tellers were ready with the result, all was tense expectancy. The reading of the figures failed to relieve the tension. At the words, 'ayes, two hundred and sixteen; noes, two hundred and sixteen', every one looked towards the Speaker, who appeared to be struck dumb at the awful responsibility of giving the casting vote. For many seconds he was unable to utter a word. Finally, pulling himself together, but obviously under stress of great emotion, he voted aye. The House of Commons had condemned the conduct of Henry Dundas, Lord Melville, as Treasurer of His Majesty's Navy.<sup>1</sup>

On the next day, Dundas resigned the office of First Lord of the Admiralty. Lord Camden then wrote to Lord Bathurst:

. . . I desired Pitt to consider how great a loss in point of ability he would sustain in Lord Melville [Dundas] and not to be hastily persuaded he could easily supply the deficiency and he promised to take no rash determination either way. My own opinion is that this is a most serious blow and one which will distress him politically as well as privately, most deeply.<sup>2</sup>

After deliberating for a fortnight, Pitt appointed Sir Charles Middleton (later Lord Barham) to take Dundas's place. Lord Harrowby praised the appointment on the ground that Middleton, an old admiral, 'would carry on Lord Melville's [Dundas's] general schemes in the Admiralty, on which he has been much consulted and to which all mankind do justice'.<sup>3</sup> When the House of Commons met after the Easter recess, Whitbread asked Pitt whether he intended to advise the King to remove Dundas from the Privy Council.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90. Mr. Lovat-Fraser has proved the falsity of the oft-repeated anecdote that Pitt jammed his cocked hat on his head and left the House with tears streaming down his face.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm. (1923), Bathurst MSS. p. 667, Earl Camden to Earl Bathurst, Apr. 10, 1805.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7, Ld. Harrowby to Earl Bathurst, Apr. 21, 1805.

Pitt, still loyal, said that he felt the removal from the Cabinet would be sufficient until Dundas's conduct was more fully investigated. Whitbread accordingly moved for a Select Committee, which was appointed on April 30th.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Pitt was urged to remove Dundas from the Privy Council before the House of Commons voted on the question, but he remained obdurate until Dundas himself, greatly distressed by the factious disputes and the worries of his family, wrote to his chief, authorizing the removal of his name.<sup>2</sup> When the question came up in the House on May 6th, Pitt, visibly much distressed, announced the removal, saying:

. . . I am not ashamed to confess—that whatever may be my deference to the House of Commons, and however anxious I may be to accede to their wishes, I certainly felt a deep and bitter pang in being compelled to be the instrument of rendering still more severe the punishment of the Noble Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Of Dundas's own feelings at this time Lady Bessborough wrote:

. . . I am miserable about Lord Melville. His nephew told me last night he was very ill, and so completely ruined by all this that he could not even keep the house at Wimbledon.<sup>4</sup>

During these weeks Dundas fervently wished to get away to his retreat at Dunira in the Highlands, but he was obliged to remain in London and await the report of the Select Committee.

Towards the end of the month this document appeared. Although it did not add much to the case, it gave Whitbread sufficient evidence on which to press for immediate impeachment. The chief facts which it brought out dealt with the transfers of naval money to other than naval services. The Prime Minister was examined and admitted that, at Dundas's suggestion, £40,000 was loaned on excellent security to the firm of

<sup>1</sup> The Report of this Committee is bound with the *Tenth Report of the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry*.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 93; Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, iv. 295.

<sup>4</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower, *Corr.* ii. 70.



Boyd & Co. to save it from bankruptcy. This was done only as a last resort, since Pitt and Dundas and the City's financial experts were certain that the failure of this great firm during the extreme financial stress of the mid-1790's would cause general bankruptcy in the City at a time of grave national emergency.<sup>1</sup> Evidence was also presented which showed that another £20,000 had been diverted from the use of the Navy to other public services.<sup>2</sup> It also appeared that £10,000 had been borrowed and replaced without interest before Trotter became Paymaster in 1786.<sup>3</sup> As far as the money transactions between Dundas and Trotter were concerned, the report alleged that about half of the £23,000 which Dundas had borrowed of Trotter and repaid without interest was public money. All the Trotter-Dundas loans, except a few small sums, had been settled by February 1803, and, after releases were executed, the accounts had been destroyed. In a letter to the Commissioners of Naval Enquiry dated March 28, 1805, Dundas said that he had never knowingly derived any advantage from any advances of public money.<sup>4</sup>

After the publication of this report, Dundas asked permission to address the House of Commons in his own defence. This was accorded, and a chair was placed within the Bar for his reception on June 11, 1805. The speech which he then delivered standing uncovered within the Bar was a moving and affecting one. Looking at Fox and many others of his former opponents, he said, 'This is not such a conclusion as I had hoped for, and as I think I had a right to expect,

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee, pp. 4-10. Among the miscellaneous Mel. MSS. in my possession are two letters from Walter Boyd, one to a friend, the other to Dundas, both written under the stress of great emotion during the night of Mar. 23-24, 1797. To Dundas, Boyd wrote: 'I am now *really in danger of perishing in the very harbour*. I need not state the dreadful consequences of any calamity to my House at this time. I must in duty declare that it would shake the whole credit of the country. . . . Mr. McDowall who carries this letter can state to you the consequences to the trade of Scotland and to his house of any calamity to mine. This is a most secret letter. I trust it will not fall into any hands but your own or Mr. Pitt's.'

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Committee, pp. 4-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

to a long and laborious life devoted to my country's service'. He dwelt at length on the fact that, during his Treasurership of the Navy, one hundred and thirty-four million pounds had passed through the Navy Pay Office without the loss of a farthing. He denied that he had authorized Trotter to speculate with the public money. He informed the House that Trotter had first come to his notice when, as a clerk in the Navy Office, he ferreted out the various frauds which were used to deprive poor sailors of the full amount of their pay. Throughout his plea Dundas refused to desert Trotter. He said quite frankly that, busy as he was with other affairs, he had never had reason to complain of the way Trotter made the payments at the Navy Office. He held to his conviction that, in so far as his own transactions with Trotter were concerned, he had never knowingly derived private profit from public money. Dundas defended the occasional use of small sums of naval money for other than naval services on the ground of public necessity. With regard to the £40,000, lent to Boyd & Co., he stoutly averred that he would have borne any obloquy rather than reveal that transaction until Pitt did so. He told the House that he had no disposition to make a humiliating submission to his accusers, and concluded:

. . . I feel the consciousness of my own rectitude deeply implanted in my breast, and I shall descend to my grave with the heartfelt satisfaction that, however the shafts of severity and cruelty may be levelled against me at the present moment, the future impartial historian will be able to hand down my name in the list of those who have strenuously, and, I hope, not ineffectually exerted, during a long life of public service, their unremitting endeavours to promote the welfare and the dearest and most essential interests of their country.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Dundas, while speaking, had conveyed the impression that he doubted the impartiality of the House or, for that matter, of any jury. His former

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-5. See also Granville Leveson-Gower, *Corr.* ii.81, Lady Bessborough to G. L.-G., June 12, 1805.

fellow-members considered his tone too haughty and defiant. Swayed by his enemies who, Lord Malmesbury said, were actuated by a party spirit more venomous and savage than any that had previously appeared in George III's reign, the House resolved upon his impeachment. A Select Committee was appointed to take further evidence and draw up the formal charges against him.<sup>1</sup>

Under Whitbread's chairmanship, this committee examined witnesses during July. At these sittings, every effort was made to get the testimony of every one even remotely connected with the affair. Dundas's and Trotter's servants and the subordinate clerks in the Government offices were called, together with Thomas Coutts himself and the other principals. Their testimony threw a flood of light on the methods by which Trotter had enriched himself by speculating with the public money.<sup>2</sup> He began his career as a clerk in the Navy Office, having obtained the post on the recommendation of Sir Gilbert Elliot (later Lord Minto). At that time, about 1780, his brother John, a tent-manufacturer, testified that he had inherited only about £2,000. Coutts, who had known Trotter all his life, believed Trotter to be worth only about £5,000 in 1786. It was at Coutts's suggestion that Pitt recommended Trotter in that year for the vacant paymaster-ship. His appointment was therefore made not entirely on the recommendation of Dundas. In view of his Whig connexions, Dundas may very probably have been lukewarm towards him at the time. Having become paymaster, he early began the practice of lodging Navy funds at Coutts's bank, in which his brother Coutts Trotter was a partner, but he does not appear to have speculated on a large scale until well into the 1790's. In brief, his system was to pay out money in small sums, as if from his own account, to various third persons who paid him interest on it and used it to

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips MSS., transcript of Mr. Gurney's shorthand notes of the sittings (in my possession).

speculate in Government securities. He even placed a considerable sum with Mansfield, Ramsay & Co. of Edinburgh and manipulated it under a name not his own. As to the effect which all this had on the Navy Office, the testimony of the subordinate clerks is of great interest. In answering Whitbread's questions, they made it perfectly clear that the whole office knew the money was lodged at Coutts's and that, while payment of Navy accounts was never actually defaulted, there were stoppages of payment in the late 1790's which sometimes lasted as long as a month. The cashier testified that, at such times, he would pay especially needy sailors out of his own pocket. For these stoppages Trotter always gave the excuse that there was no money under the particular head of service asked for. Of the payment of the money into Coutts's, Trotter made no concealment whatever. While walking over to Coutts's to deposit the cheque for £1,000,000 which he drew on the Bank of England in 1795, he showed the cheque to his friend Dr. Ainslie, whom he chanced to meet in the street. In his testimony before the Committee, Trotter admitted that his own personal fortune was £51,000 in 1805. This, of course, took no account of the expenditures he had made in former years. To ascertain some of these, the Committee called the architects who had superintended the work on his newly acquired houses at Blackheath and on his estate at Dreghorn, Midlothian. Although none of his expenditures could be computed with accuracy, the testimony leads to the conclusion that his gains through speculation did not greatly exceed the £46,000 which he admitted.

These hearings brought out little additional information in regard to Dundas's transactions with Trotter. Try as he would, Whitbread could not get at any details of Trotter's loans to Dundas of £23,000 or thereabouts. He could learn the nature of the security when there was any, and could have solicitors bring in copies of the releases by which the loans were discharged, but it does

not appear that he could get a witness to make a single statement which led to the conclusion that Dundas knowingly borrowed public money for private profit. Coutts testified that in 1800, after Dundas had resigned as Treasurer of the Navy, Dundas had come to him personally and solicited a loan of £13,000. Coutts gave him the money and accepted in part payment an assignment of the salary, fees, and perquisites of Dundas's sinecure office, the Keepership of the Scottish Signet. Later Dundas paid £9,000 on this loan, using money from his son's marriage settlement. It would seem that this loan was used to pay off some of the Trotter loans, but Coutts did not know exactly where the £13,000 went. All the principal witnesses, Thomas Coutts, Coutts Trotter, John Trotter, the solicitors, the cashier of the Navy Office, and the agent of Mansfield, Ramsay & Co., agreed that Alexander Trotter's practice of depositing the Navy money at Coutts's was so notorious that Dundas could not have helped knowing of it. On the other hand, they would not commit themselves on the question of whether or not Dundas had known of the extent and variety of Trotter's speculations. John Trotter testified that both his brothers had kept the speculations a secret from him, and that, until the publication of the *Tenth Report*, he had no inkling of what was going on. All things considered, the evidence most damaging to Dundas which was brought out at these hearings had nothing to do with the Trotters. It lay in the testimony of the employees of the Navy Office. They said that, *before* 1786 when Trotter became paymaster, public money had been used to buy Government securities, and that there was a general feeling in the office against the then paymaster who, it was supposed, was sharing the profits of his speculations with the treasurer, Dundas. George Swaffield, who had worked in the Navy Office since the early 1770's, said that these irregularities occurred under certain treasurers and paymasters and not under others. They had occurred when Welbore Ellis was

treasurer during the American War and they had not occurred again until Dundas came into office. Of Isaac Barré, who preceded Dundas as treasurer, Swaffield said:

... No, he was not that kind of man. I never did it [bought securities] for him.<sup>1</sup>

As the months wore on with the delays incident to the preparation for an impeachment, a reaction of public sentiment took place in favour of Dundas. It was felt that partisan violence had over-reached itself. The King, who is said to have remarked when he first heard of Dundas's arraignment in the House of Commons: 'Is that all? I wonder how he slept after it. Bring my horse',<sup>2</sup> wrote to Pitt as early as the last week in May that he was disturbed at the virulence against Dundas, 'which is unbecoming the character of Englishmen who, naturally, when a man is fallen, are too noble to pursue their blows'. Later he wrote: 'All that is necessary for example to futurity has been done and anything more is wanton punishing of a fallen man.'<sup>3</sup> The same feeling was more generally expressed in the summer of 1805 by cartoons and caricatures. Gillray drew Dundas as a helpless wounded lion surrounded by jackasses, two of whom bore the names of Hiley Addington, brother of the former Prime Minister, and Bragge-Bathurst, his brother-in-law. Said one jackass to the other: 'Very highly indebted to the lion, brother Hiley', and the other replied, 'Then kick him again, brother Bragge.' Another cartoon represented Whitbread, a figure built up of tubs and barrels, as 'forsaking malt and grains to mash and batter nobles' brains, by levelling rancour led'.<sup>4</sup>

Before the interminable delays attending the pre-

<sup>1</sup> Phillips MSS., transcript of Mr. Gurney's shorthand notes of the sittings, in my possession. All the information I have on these hearings is taken from this MS.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 97. Anecdote told by the Duke of Clarence to Ld. Colchester. Colchester, Lord, *Correspondence*, iii. 519.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* See Stanhope, *Pitt*, iv. 292.

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

paration of his case were over, Dundas had received another heavy blow in the death of Pitt (January 1806). Although their friendship had cooled<sup>1</sup> and it may be very much doubted, on the evidence of Wilberforce, that Pitt's death was hastened by the fall of Dundas, it is perfectly evident that Dundas was in absolute despair. The death of Pitt seemed to take from him the last prop on which he could rely. Lord Aberdeen, who saw Dundas frequently early in 1806, said that he had never seen more poignant grief. Dundas cherished the last note which Pitt wrote him,<sup>2</sup> and everything which was even remotely connected with their last meeting at Bath in December, when Dundas pointed out to Pitt the deficiencies in the distribution of the fleet. Dundas subsequently wrote to one of his daughters that Pitt's death was certainly the severest stroke which his public or private feelings could receive.<sup>3</sup> In 1809, when thanking a friend for the gift of a bust of Pitt, he wrote:

. . . I feel very sensibly the mark of attention and respect you have bestowed upon me. It is one which interests my warmest feelings, feelings which can only expire with my latest breath.<sup>4</sup>

The few letters which survive for the last years of his life frequently bear witness to the esteem and affection in which he held the memory of Pitt.

The trial of Dundas finally began before the House of Lords on April 29, 1806. On this, the last occasion up to the present time when resort has been had to impeachment, the scene lacked none of the colour and splendid ceremony which had characterized former impeachments. Campbell, later Lord Chancellor, wrote of it to his father:

. . . I never knew what earthly magnificence was till

<sup>1</sup> In 1802 Pitt said he had not received a letter from Dundas in months. Sir G. Rose said in 1804 that the King knew Dundas to have seen very little of Pitt. See Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-100.

<sup>2</sup> This has recently been bought for the British Museum.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to Ann, Sept. 17, 1806.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS. in possession of Lady Melville, D. to —, Feb. 11, 1809.

yesterday, when I was present at Lord Melville's trial. Ye gods! the peeresses' box. A glory seemed to play round their countenances and to shoot in vivid flashes to the extremities of the Hall.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas bore himself with dignity and betrayed no anger or impatience at the most virulent accusations of his accusers, although all the while, as Sir Gilbert Elliot (Lord Minto) wrote, he 'looked like death'.<sup>2</sup> His counsel were Plomer, Hobhouse, and William Adam, his old political enemy. They were opposed by Piggott, the Attorney-General, and Romilly, the Solicitor-General. Whitbread presented the case for the House of Commons with great formality. For his opening speech, he donned velvet coat, bag wig, and laced ruffles, much to the amusement of Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who wrote afterwards to a friend:

. . . You would have laughed had you seen the ridiculous care with which his [Whitbread's] friends gave him sips of wine and water to wet his whistle and clouts for his mouth and nose. I thought his speech very clever but in miserable bad taste, and so abusive that Lord Melville smiled very frequently. That monster Fox was there, his sallow cheeks hanging down to his paunch, and his scowling eyes turned sometimes upon Mr. Whitbread, sometimes on the rows of pretty peeresses who sat eating sandwiches from silk indispensables and putting themselves into proper attitudes to astonish the representatives of the Commons of England occupying the opposite benches.<sup>3</sup>

The speech was nevertheless a powerful oration which ably set forth the evidence collected by the Select Committees. After fifteen days of proceedings, presided over by Lord Erskine, whose conduct on the wool-sack was above reproach, the trial closed with votes of acquittal on all the charges. The majorities ranged from twenty-seven to one hundred and twenty-eight. The small majorities, twenty-seven and thirty-one, were on the second and third charges, those which

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-2; Campbell, John, *Life of Lord Campbell*, i. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102; Minto, Nina, Countess of, *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, iii. 382.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.



alleged that Dundas had connived at Trotter's speculations for his personal advantage.

To many minds, this verdict seemed a great miscarriage of justice. The bitterest Whigs, such as Francis Horner, regarded Dundas's acquittal as a foul stain upon the records of Parliament, but, with the passage of time, many of those chiefly concerned in the case became of opinion that Dundas was substantially innocent. Whitbread himself in after years said he had never suspected Dundas of peculating for private and sordid gain.<sup>1</sup> Lord Brougham who, at the time of the trial, referred to Dundas as a 'nasty dog' and a 'shark who should be brought to justice', changed this opinion many years afterwards when he was composing his *Historical Sketches of Statesmen in the Time of George III*. In that work he wrote:

. . . The case proved against him [Dundas] was not by any means so clear as to give us the right to charge the great majority of his peers with corrupt and dishonourable conduct in acquitting him while it is a known fact that the judges who attended the trial were, with the exception of the Lord Chief Justice, all clearly convinced of his innocence.<sup>2</sup>

Even in 1805-6 there were many who took Pitt's view that Dundas had been guilty of nothing more than gross carelessness and incompetence in neglecting the Navy Office and his own personal financial affairs. Those who knew of his open-handed, generous nature, and of his indifference to wealth, no doubt agreed with Lady Bessborough that, while Dundas 'never dreamt of embezzling the public money', 'nobody ever managed so ill'.<sup>3</sup>

Of Dundas's own personal conviction of his innocence there is no doubt. Within a few hours of the verdict of acquittal, he wrote to his daughter Ann:

. . . Although you will have many correspondents to

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 103, quoted from Yonge's *Life of Lord Liverpool*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104, quoted from Brougham's *Historical Sketches of Statesmen in the Time of George III*, the sketch of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville.

<sup>3</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower, *Corr.* ii. 136, Lady Bessborough to G. L.-G., Nov. 16, 1805.

announce to you the complete triumph I gained yesterday over my persecutors, I cannot amidst all my hurry, refrain from sending you these few lines with my own hand to tell you of it.

Mr. Pitt's death appeared to be a mortal blow to my cause and left me totally in the hands of my enemies. The party spirit continued unremitting to the last moment. Five Cabinet Ministers voted on the day of decision, all of them against me, but I prevailed on every article by a large majority. The five Ministers were the Chancellor, Lord Fitzwilliam, Lord Moira, Lord Sydmouth and Lord Ellenborough.<sup>1</sup>

Three months later, he wrote again to Ann:

. . . I wrote to you immediately after the trial ended in Westminster Hall. I had certainly at the time every reason to be highly gratified by the reception with the public which the event produced, and every circumstance since that period has tended more and more to confirm that feeling. It was natural for all my friends, particularly you at a distance, to be anxious about my health and spirits under a persecution of so long duration; but, in fact, neither the one nor the other ever suffered from that circumstance.

. . . If I met with justice, I had no doubt of being acquitted, and I was made the victim of party and power, which [i.e. this] was much believed after Mr. Pitt's death. I could bear it with fortitude, well knowing what would be the general feeling of the present day and of posterity upon that subject. Mr. Pitt's death was certainly the severest stroke which my public or private feelings could receive at the moment, but, so far as the proceedings at Westminster could be taken into consideration, the loss of his protection tended solely to increase the measure of my triumph.<sup>2</sup>

Dundas's entire career is a witness to his indifference to wealth for wealth's sake. Although he had held some of the best paid government positions, he was never financially at ease, and he died encumbered with heavy debts.<sup>3</sup> It is most pathetic to read a letter

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., D. to Ann, dated London, June 13, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Ann, dated Dunira, Sept. 17, 1806.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS. in the possession of Violet, Lady Melville, R. S. D. to Sir John Hope, July 3, 1811. Another letter, R. D. to D., Dec. 30, 1809, discusses the negotiation of a loan from an Edinr. insurance company. See also Mel. MSS.,

which he wrote to his son in January 1811, four months before his death. He was then driven to suggesting the sale of the wood on his Highland estate to clear off his more pressing and annoying debts. Apparently replying to his son's request that he come to London, he wrote:

... Among the other causes of aversion I have at going to London is the disagreeable feeling I have of being exposed to the urgent demands of tradesmen and shop-keepers, which I cannot immediately answer. And I had indeed firmly resolved never to go there as long as that circumstance existed.<sup>1</sup>

His whole career bears witness to the fact that he was no corrupt and venal politician who thought only of pelf and profit. To take only one example from the many which have been discussed in these pages, the care which he bestowed on the selection of men for the highest positions in the Government of India shows a sincere desire to curb and keep within bounds the widespread corruption in India. In this connexion, not a shred of evidence has been found to show that Dundas accepted monetary *douceurs* from India appointees or from native sovereigns.

While all this is very true, it is nevertheless impossible, in the face of the evidence presented in the *Tenth Report*, in the reports of the Select Committees, and at the trial, to hold Dundas absolutely blameless. No doubt what he had done did not deserve impeachment. There would seem to be no comparison between the utmost that can be alleged against Dundas and what Warren Hastings is generally admitted to have done; and Hastings was acquitted. The chief point in Dundas's favour is the smallness of the sums which were involved.<sup>2</sup> Petty corruption was always present

Misc., Edwards, D. to Alexander Hope, Oct. 12, 1808, *re* debts caused by impeachment expenses. 'By a further addition to my system of parsimony, I may get rid of the whole encumbrance [£5,000] which my most unfortunate acceptance of the Head of the Admiralty, joined to Mr. Pitt's premature death, brought upon me.'

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS. in possession of Lady Melville, D. to his son, dated Melville Castle, Jan. 16, 1811 (original).

<sup>2</sup> Wood in his MSS. 'Life' claims that Dundas refused to take salaries due to him to the amount of £34,000 (more than he was accused of borrowing from the public funds), but I have not been able to confirm this.

in the British Government offices in the eighteenth century. Sometimes it screened itself under the mask of respectability provided by 'fees', 'perquisites', or 'sinecures'. Sometimes it made itself felt in devious and unknown ways. A newly-appointed official needed to possess ideas of political and self-conscious rectitude akin to those of Wilberforce if he were to avoid being enmeshed in the tentacles of the system. It was probably on these grounds that many peers voted for acquittal. They realized the absurdity of condemning a man for allowing irregularities which were by no means novel in the dealings of government offices or in the letting of government contracts. Lord Eldon, in fact, admitted that he would rather cut off his right arm than be guilty of Dundas's 'culpable negligence' and 'criminal indulgence', but he defended him on technical legal points which were referred to the Judges.<sup>1</sup> Although Dundas did not deserve the ignominy of an impeachment, there was certainly a case against him. It is not his use of the Navy funds to tide over a national financial crisis or to accommodate other public services which is especially blameworthy. In fact, some might consider such action praiseworthy in view of the exigencies of the national emergency, and it is quite probable that the money which sent Professor Hugh Cleghorn to accomplish the conquest of Ceylon came from this very source. It is, on the contrary, his transactions with Trotter which deserve the most censure. His destruction of his papers, his refusal to testify, his retention of the treasurership for over eighteen years, all these have a very ill look. Even so, there is little reason to think that he, busy man that he was, knew of the widespread nature of Trotter's operations. All we can in fairness say on the basis of the available evidence is that it seems probable that Dundas was aware that speculation was going on in the Navy Office. However blameworthy he may have been for carelessness and negligence in the

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

management of that office, he cannot be called *guilty* of conspiring to defraud the public. Without more conclusive evidence, no final definite judgement on the whole subject of his conduct can be given. There is, however, little doubt that, from whatever angle they are viewed, the impeachment and the circumstances which gave rise to it must remain a source of regret to those who recognize the sincerity and indefatigability with which Dundas served his country in other capacities than that of Treasurer of His Majesty's Navy.

The acquittal of Dundas naturally caused great joy in Scotland, where the proceedings against him had been followed by his friends and political adherents with the utmost grief and dismay. In February 1806, the future Sir Walter Scott, who was a friend of Dundas's son, had exclaimed: 'Poor Lord Melville! How does he look? My heart bleeds when I think on his situation.'<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards he wrote:

. . . I own Lord Melville's misfortunes affect me deeply. . . . I have seen [the time] when the streets of Edinburgh were thought by the inhabitants almost too vulgar for Lord Melville to walk upon; and now I fear that, with his power and influence gone, his presence would be accounted by many, from whom he has deserved other thoughts, an embarrassment, if not something worse. All this is very vile—it is one of the occasions when Providence, as it were, industriously turns the tapestry, to let us see the ragged ends of the worsted which compose its most beautiful figures.<sup>2</sup>

Three months later the tidings of Dundas's acquittal were welcomed with unbounded enthusiasm. Dundas began to receive letters of congratulation in great numbers.<sup>3</sup> Lord Adam Gordon spoke of the verdict as 'a complete triumph over your inveterate enemies, for whose unprecedented malicious conduct I am con-

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 106; Lockhart, *Life of Scott*, Edinr. ed., 1902, ii. 263.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted from a letter to Ellis of Mar. 1806.

<sup>3</sup> For the letters from Lord Hopetoun, the Comte de Vaudreuil, and George Abercromby, see Omond, *Arniston Memoirs*, pp. 261-4.

fidest none of your lordship's connexions can have felt more indignant than myself'.<sup>1</sup> Scott and others of Dundas's Edinburgh friends planned a great celebration in honour of the event. Although the Whig Solicitor-General tried to stop this on the ground that celebrations in honour of Dundas would cause a riot, a considerable illumination took place in Edinburgh on the night agreed upon.<sup>2</sup> On June 27th, Dundas's health was drunk at a public dinner. For this occasion, Scott had planned and written a song which concluded with the words:

But the brewer [Whitbread] we'll hoax  
Tally-ho to the fox [Fox]  
And drink Melville forever as long as we live.

Sung by James Ballantyne amidst thunderous applause, the song gave great offence to the Edinburgh Whigs, some of whom were Scott's personal friends.<sup>3</sup> Of this dinner, Scott himself gave an amusing account while writing to Dundas's son on the following day:

... I have deferred saying my gratitude on the late glorious decision of the House of Peers till I should be able to tell you at the same time how spendidly our great *gaudeamus* went off yesterday which indeed I soon found baffled all description. It was impossible for the warmest friends of Lord Melville to have anticipated that so huge a meeting should have been entirely made up of respectable materials and animated by the same general soul. I had the happiness to add something to the mirth, and I will say, the enthusiasm of the meeting, by the enclosed ditties which I got Ballantyne, the printer, to holloa forth with the voice of a Stentor. I should be happy Lord Melville saw them, as no man ought to feel or can feel more happy than I have done on this occasion which I beg you to express to his Lordship in the strongest and most respectful language. . . .

Remember me kindly to Mrs. Dundas and excuse brevity,

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N. L. S., Lord Adam Gordon to D., June 13, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Melville possesses a copy of the proclamation ordering all to keep within doors and refrain from disturbing the peace.

<sup>3</sup> Since Fox did not die until Sept. 1806, it is not true, as Walter Savage Landor says, that Scott 'sang a triumphal song on the death of a minister whom he had flattered'. See Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 108, for a full discussion of this.

for my head aches somewhat, and my throat, as Falstaff says, is hoarse with the bellowing and singing of anthems.<sup>1</sup>

Of Scott's sympathy and support during these trying months, Dundas was fully appreciative. In 1806 he helped Scott to receive a reversion of a clerkship of the High Court of Session,<sup>2</sup> and, later on, would have been glad to enable Scott, who was already doing most of the work, to enjoy full participation in the salary and perquisites of the office if he had not felt that such participation was made illegal by a recent statute. In this decision, Scott readily acquiesced, saying that he would rather work for nothing all his life than receive emolument which could not legally be given to him.<sup>3</sup>

As soon as he could leave London after the acquittal, Dundas went to Scotland to rest and recuperate at his Highland lodge, Dunira, in Perthshire. Because of his financial embarrassments and his increasing heart trouble, he spent most of the remaining five years of his life in Scotland. Although he made occasional visits to London in order to speak in the House of Lords, where Lord Holland called his reappearance 'characteristic and constitutional effrontery',<sup>4</sup> he never again chose to thrust himself prominently before the public. He refused an earldom in 1809, and nothing came of a plan to bring him back to the Admiralty as soon as a Tory ministry returned to office.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he remained a power behind the throne and his name was ultimately restored to the list of Privy Councillors, and his son received a post at the India Board. So much was his advice in demand that, even within a year of the acquittal, Lord Henry Petty found the stream of visitors going to and from Dunira so numerous that he could not find a carriage to take him

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Scott Corr. N.L.S. (original), Scott to R. S. D., Edinburgh, June 28, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Scott Corr., N.L.S., Scott to D., undated, refers to the clerkship as a matter which, without Dundas's kind and active patronage, would never have advanced so far.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, various letters; Scott received the clerkship entire in 1812.

<sup>4</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party*, i. 238.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; Colchester, *Correspondence*, ii. 218; Dudley, Lord, *Letters to Ivy*, p. 62.

thither.<sup>1</sup> Dundas, during these years, frequently wrote letters on many aspects of public policy and was especially outspoken against those who wished to ignore the King's scruples on the Catholic question.<sup>2</sup> He was also much incensed at Lord Grenville's 'rash, intemperate and hot-headed' plan for reforming the Scottish judicial system.<sup>3</sup> Apart, however, from such activities as these he devoted the hours which were not given to farming, shooting, or 'laughing with friends' to that work of Scottish political management on which his great power had once been founded and which had always, even in the busiest years of his active life, claimed a large share of his energies.

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 111; *Creevey Papers*, i. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., D. to the Lord Chancellor, May 18, 1808.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 748, N.L.S., the same to the same, Apr. 19, 1807, and subsequent letters.



PART II  
THE POLITICAL MANAGEMENT OF  
SCOTLAND 1775-1811



## THE POLITICAL STATE OF SCOTLAND

FOR an adequate comprehension of Dundas's activities in Scottish politics a knowledge of the broad outlines of the Scottish political system of the eighteenth century is essential. No system more likely to make possible the political ascendancy of one dominant individual could have been conceived by deliberate ingenuity than that which time and custom made ready for Dundas's master hand. Although the machinery of modern universal suffrage by no means prevents the manipulation of the votes of large masses of men, the modern 'machine' politician has to face problems which never troubled Dundas. The Treaty of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 arranged for the representation of Scotland in the new British Parliament by sixteen peers in the House of Lords and forty-five members in the House of Commons. The election of the sixteen Scottish representative peers was held in Holyrood Palace. Each Scottish peer<sup>1</sup> voted for sixteen of his fellow-peers *en bloc*. After the votes were counted by two principal clerks of the Court of Session, the peers were listed in order of the number of votes cast for each and the sixteen highest on the list were declared elected. An absent peer could vote by sending in a signed list, duly attested, or by delivering his vote to a fellow-peer to be cast by proxy, but no peer present at the meeting could hold more than two such proxies. Difficulties naturally arose if it happened that, when the votes were all in, two or more peers were tied for the last places on the list of sixteen. It also often happened that the right of certain peers to vote was challenged by their fellows. There was considerable legal confusion on the question how the acceptance or inheritance of other peerages

<sup>1</sup> During Dundas's time, the number of peers voting was probably about seventy.

affected a Scottish peer's right to vote in these elections.<sup>1</sup> Since the House of Lords itself was the final authority in settling such difficulties, the result of a Scottish peer's election might remain in doubt for months or even years.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, however, the peers' elections presented no great difficulties to the political manager. It had become customary before Dundas's time for the Government of the day to send to Edinburgh its own leet of sixteen Scottish peers, most of whom were usually elected.<sup>3</sup> The elections of the forty-five Scottish members of the House of Commons, thirty from the counties and fifteen from the royal burghs, was a far more complicated business.

In the eighteenth century there were thirty-three Scottish counties. Twenty-seven of these elected a representative to every Parliament. The other six, the smallest counties in Scotland, were grouped in three pairs: Bute and Caithness, Nairn and Cromarty, Clackmannan and Kinross. Bute, Nairn, and Clackmannan elected representatives to the first Parliament after the Union. At the next General Election, Caithness, Cromarty, and Kinross each chose a representative, and, in this manner, the six continued to alternate. For this reason there were always three counties in Scotland which were unrepresented in Parliament, and if the duration of a Parliament were unusually short, this meant that there was unfair discrimination against the three whose turn it was to be represented in that Parliament, for at the next dissolution they had to give way at once to the other group of three. The franchise in the Scottish counties did not depend upon the possession of property in the modern sense of the word. Since the representative system of the ancient kingdom of Scotland was based upon feudal law and usage, the franchise belonged to the *immediate* vassals of

<sup>1</sup> Wight, Alexander, *Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of Parliament, especially in Scotland* (published 1784), discussed these matters at length, pp. 113 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *V. infra*, pp. 231-6, for account of the extraordinary election of 1790.

<sup>3</sup> Wight, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 113 ff. In case of an elected peer's death or disability, the procedure at the resulting by-election was the same except that *one* and not *sixteen* were voted for.



the Crown. The law of 1681 gave the franchise to all who held of the King either 'forty-shilling land of old extent'<sup>1</sup> or land rated at £400 Scots (£33 sterling) of valued rent. The vote therefore did not depend upon property or possession; it depended upon 'superiority', i.e. the fact that the land was *held of the King*. For this reason, in the eighteenth century, qualifications to vote in Scottish counties are spoken of as 'superiorities'. The one exception to the rule that land, to confer a vote, must be held of the King, was in the county of Sutherland where, since the Earl held practically the *whole* county of the King, it had become customary for the franchise to be granted to the *immediate* vassals of the Earl of Sutherland who held of him land rated at £200 Scots (£16 10s. sterling) of valued rent.

Since a vote was considered to be attached to a 'superiority' and not to a person, it devolved upon persons (not the original holders), to whom the law might have given the 'superiority'. For example, if the lands in question had been adjudged to a creditor, the vote went to the creditor; if they had been mortgaged as security for debt, the vote went to the mortgagee (wadsetter); if the original holder were dead and the legal formalities of installing the heir were incomplete, the vote went to the heir (apparent heir); if the holder were a woman, the vote went to the husband; if the holder were a child who inherited his right through his mother, the vote went to his father during his minority. Moreover, a man who held of the Crown might surrender his charter to the Crown and cause the Crown to regrant the land in smaller holdings, each large enough to confer a vote, to persons suggested by him, such persons to hold during life only and without right to transmit their holding to their heirs. Such persons, known as life-renters, could therefore vote, and it was also provided that, if the life-renter did not vote, the vote should pass to the *fiar*, the person in

<sup>1</sup> The 'old extent' was a valuation of the lands in Scotland, supposed to have been made in the reign of Alexander III (1249-85).

whom (subject to the life-renter's possession) the fee, or full property of the estate, was vested. No woman could vote. No Roman Catholic or person holding certain offices of trust and profit under the Crown enumerated in various statutes<sup>1</sup> could vote. No Scottish peer or eldest son of a Scottish peer could vote or be elected. Irish peers (for example, the Earl of Fife), being considered commoners, could both vote and be elected. No one could cast more than one vote in one county, but any one qualified to vote in more than one county could vote in each of the counties in which he held sufficient land if it was possible for him to attend the election meetings. The elections were not all held on the same day throughout Scotland, but they usually occurred within the same week. Any one, not otherwise disqualified, who held a 'superiority' sufficient to give a vote in a Scottish county could be elected to represent that county in Parliament.

The franchise in the Scottish counties was still further restricted in practice by the fact that no one could vote unless his name actually stood on the county 'Roll of Freeholders', the term 'freeholders' being used in Scotland solely to designate those who held land of the Crown.<sup>2</sup> These rolls were made up annually at Michaelmas, and names could also be added or struck off at the county meetings occasioned by a General Election, or by a by-election (if the county member of Parliament had died or accepted a Government office which necessitated his re-election or a new election). In order to be eligible for enrolment the prospective voter must have held a sufficient 'superiority' for a full year. For this reason, it might happen that a person otherwise fully qualified, might be unable to vote or to be elected merely because his land-titles had not been fully made up a year before the most recent county

<sup>1</sup> For example, statutes in the reign of George II disqualified all persons concerned in the collection of the Scottish excise. The usual legal disqualifications also applied (i.e. insanity, idiocy, infancy, refusal to take the oath of allegiance, &c.).

<sup>2</sup> With the exception above noted, p. 178, as to the County of Sutherland.

meeting for the adjustment of the roll. County meetings could only be attended by those whose names were already on the roll. The procedure at both the regular annual Michaelmas meeting and at election meetings was essentially the same. The freeholder who had last been elected to represent the county in Parliament<sup>1</sup> presided while the other freeholders chose a chairman (*praeses*) and a clerk. This being done, the meeting proceeded to the revision of the old roll. The names of those who had died or been disqualified were struck off, and the names of those newly qualified added, all disputed points being settled by a majority vote, the *praeses* having the casting vote in case of a tie. All decisions on these questions of enrolment were subject to review by the Court of Session in case of protest. If it were an election meeting, the sheriff of the county attended and read the election writ and the statutes against bribery; and certain oaths against bribery and 'fictitious' voting, which will be discussed later, were usually put to the meeting. After the roll had been adjusted, the election of a member to represent the county in Parliament took place, the *praeses* having the casting vote in case of a tie. On the announcement of the result by the clerk, the meeting adjourned. The proceedings of an election meeting were always subject to review by a committee of the House of Commons.

From this brief description of the rules governing the exercise of the county franchise, in which no attempt has been made to go into every detail of the feudal law on which it was based, it will be easily seen that the system furnished great opportunity for the practice of political and legal chicanery of all sorts. When Dundas entered political life, every Scotchman knew that a very large number of the votes in each county were fictitious. Scotland being a land of large proprietors

<sup>1</sup> If this man were absent, the right of presiding devolved upon the Sheriff-Clerk and the casting vote went to the freeholder who had last presided at an election meeting; failing him, to the last who had presided at a Michaelmas meeting; failing him, to the freeholder whose name was first on the roll.



and great estates, it was most natural that her leading nobles and the heads of her great county families should take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the outworn feudal law to create votes for persons who would implicitly do their bidding at election meetings. Such votes were colloquially termed 'faggot' votes. By the creation of these 'faggot' votes, the descendants of the smaller barons, the class which the old laws had intended to enfranchise, were often deprived of all political power.

The legal subterfuges used in creating votes were many and various, and all were extremely complicated. No attempt will be made to explain them in detail. Suffice it to say that, in spite of the statutes passed and legal decisions given against it, the practice of creating votes continued throughout the eighteenth century. In the first years after the Union with England, the large proprietors began to make votes for their friends by conveyances in trust. Accordingly, a statute was passed shortly before the death of Queen Anne authorizing an oath which, on the request of any freeholder, could be put to any other freeholder suspected of holding his vote by virtue of a conveyance in trust. Since this failed to check the abuse to any extent, a more stringent oath was authorized by statute in 1734. This oath, the 'trust oath' of Dundas's day, was far more effective, although it is clear that men perjured themselves with impunity. About nine years later, a statute quite definitely put a stop to the creation of fictitious voting qualifications based on 'forty-shilling land of old extent'. This was done by denying enrolment to any one claiming a 'superiority' over 'forty-shilling land of old extent' unless he could produce a *retour*<sup>1</sup> of his lands dated prior to September 16, 1681. To stop the creation of fictitious votes based on 'superiorities' over lands rated at £400 Scots of valued rent was a far more difficult matter. The lawyers got round the 'trust oath'

<sup>1</sup> *Retour* is a return of a jury, by which a successor to an estate was declared heir to his ancestor. See Adam, C. E., *op. cit.*, p. xix.

by advising the great proprietors that the creation of life-rent 'superiorities' for their friends was still within the law. A complicated legal process made it possible for a great proprietor to give several persons life-rent 'superiorities' over bits of land each valued at £400 Scots without disturbing either himself or his tenants in the least. The Commissioners of the Land Tax in Scotland who certified to the rated value of lands were of almost no assistance in checking the creation of 'faggot' votes since they were usually under the control of the Government political manager or of the great proprietors. In the 1760's and 1770's several decisions which militated against the practice of making votes were handed down by the Court of Session, but they were either reversed by the House of Lords or were defeated by the use of new legal subterfuges. Finally, in 1782, a decision which protected a sub-vassal from the multiplication of his 'superiors' through the creation of life-rent 'superiorities' was handed down. This had some effect, but it came too late to disturb Dundas very much. His power depended more on alliances with nobles and great proprietors who had already made votes than upon any personal manufacture of votes on his part. A large share of his power also came from the support of those whose votes were genuine and not fictitious.<sup>1</sup>

'Faggot' votes were not the only abuse which the Scottish election laws did not check. The whole representative system was influenced by the dependence of the majority of voters upon political favours within the gift of the Government. Whether their votes were genuine or fictitious, all or nearly all were primarily interested in securing jobs for themselves and their relatives either in some branch of the Government service or in the East India Company. There were also other ways in which elections could be influenced. Since the majority of those attending a

<sup>1</sup> On 'faggot' votes see Adam, C. E., *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xxviii, where the subject, especially *in re* the legal decisions, is taken up in detail.

county meeting decided upon the enrolment or non-enrolment of new voters, it was often possible to prevent the enrolment of 'objectionable' persons by recourse to legal technicalities. The injured party might not often think it worth his while to sue in the Court of Session for redress. The provision that a prospective voter must have held his 'superiority' for a full year was a fertile source of abuse. The sheriff of the county, almost invariably a Government nominee or a henchman of the leading county nobleman, had considerable latitude in fixing the date of the election. By fixing the election for the day before or the day after certain newly-acquired 'superiorities' had legally matured, he could, in effect, enfranchise or disfranchise their holders.

The actual state of the franchise in the Scottish counties can best be summed up in numerical terms. In 1788 the number of voters in each county varied from 12 in Bute to 214 in Ayr. There were only ten counties in which the county roll held more than 100 names. It was very rare indeed for all who were enrolled to attend an election meeting, especially if the result were a foregone conclusion. Francis Jeffrey enjoyed telling the story of a county meeting in Bute attended by only one voter, who went through all the forms and elected himself to Parliament.<sup>1</sup> There were, in all, 2,662 names on the county rolls. Allowance for the names which appeared more than once would make this number smaller by at least one hundred. Of this total of 2,662 about 1,370 were 'faggot' votes, made and controlled by about 220 influential noblemen and large proprietors.<sup>2</sup> Since the rural population of Scotland at this time was about a million, the county electorate which sent thirty members to the House of Commons was, as Jeffrey said, an 'insignificant oligarchy'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Debates*, 3rd Series, vii. 528-30.

<sup>2</sup> These statistics have been computed from the data given in Adam, C. E., *Political State of Scotland in 1788*.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, *Parl. Debates*, 3rd Series, vii. 528-30.

The burgh electorate which chose the remaining fifteen of Scotland's forty-five members of the House of Commons was almost equally oligarchic and unrepresentative. In the burghs the franchise did not depend upon feudal law but upon a form of town government which had likewise descended from the Middle Ages and had long since lost any democratic or representative character. The right of representation in Parliament was, according to medieval usage, restricted to the royal burghs, i.e. towns which had received their charters direct from the King. In the eighteenth century there were sixty-six of these, many of them being places of small population and no real importance. They were all governed by town councils which were, in effect, closed corporations, the right to elect the council for each year being vested in the council of the previous year. The only vestige of any former democratic element in their composition resulted from the survival of certain remnants of the medieval gild system. In many of these towns, the 'setts' or constitutions, which had come down through the centuries much altered by time and custom, provided that the council should elect to membership a very small number of the deacons chosen by the various trade gilds. In Edinburgh and probably in a few other towns the ordinary council was augmented at election meetings by the inclusion of deacons of trades who had not been elected to it. This, however, gave no real representation of the population at large, for the gilds were themselves, more often than not, closed and oligarchic corporations which bore no real resemblance to their medieval prototypes. Ordinarily the town council of a royal burgh numbered about twenty persons. In 1790 the total number of town councillors in the sixty-six royal burghs was 1,301. Prior to 1707 the predecessors of these people had directly elected the burgh representatives in the old Scottish Parliament. After the Union they and their successors elected the fifteen burgh members of the House of



Commons under a scheme of indirect election which was just as complex and just as productive of political abuses as the system of direct election in the counties.

For the purpose of electing members to Parliament, the burghs, with the exception of Edinburgh, were grouped in fourteen districts, nine districts of five burghs each, and five districts of four burghs each. Edinburgh elected a member by itself. For the sake of convenience, Edinburgh is referred to as a burgh district on the accompanying maps and compilation of statistics. In Edinburgh alone was the election a direct election. At an Edinburgh election meeting the town council numbered thirty-three<sup>1</sup> and they elected the member of Parliament by a majority vote. In the fourteen districts of burghs, the election was necessarily indirect. In each district the town council of each burgh elected a delegate to represent the town at the election meeting held at the presiding burgh of the district. The presiding burgh was *not* the most important or the most ancient burgh in the district. Each burgh within a district presided in turn according to an order of rotation fixed at the time of the Union with England. The burghs in each district were then arranged in order of precedence according to the dates of their first charters from the King. In each district the burgh which had been longest a royal burgh presided at the first general election after the Union and at the next general election gave way to the burgh next in order. For any election, there therefore met, at the burgh whose turn it was to preside, either four or five persons, each bearing a signed and sealed commission from the burgh which had elected him its delegate. These four or five, as the case might be, elected the member of Parliament for the district, the delegate from the presiding burgh having the casting

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-three, including the eight deacons of trade gilds, not members of the 'ordinary' council of twenty-five. These deacons in 1780 successfully defended their right to be included in the council at election meetings. See Wight, *op. cit.*, book iv, ch. i.

vote in case of a tie. Ties were frequent in the five districts which contained only four burghs.

In some respects this election system in the burghs seems simpler than that in counties. There were, nevertheless, just as many opportunities for legal subterfuge. In Edinburgh, the statutes had neglected to name a specific time at which the Lord Provost should hold the election after he had received the election writ from the sheriff. The Lord Provost could therefore delay the election to suit his convenience. In 1780 Dundas's candidate lost the Edinburgh election because the Lord Provost delayed the election until the town council for the following year had been chosen.<sup>1</sup> In the burgh districts, there were many legal formalities to be complied with. The sheriffs of the counties in which the burghs were located were obliged to notify each burgh and name the burgh whose turn it was to preside. The provost of each burgh had to summon the council to meet two days after he received the sheriff's notification. The election of delegates had to be made two days after that. The delegates had to meet at the presiding burgh and elect the member on the thirtieth day after the *teste* of the election writ. If any legal flaw could be found in any one of these formalities, it might invalidate the election. For example, the sheriffs might make mistakes in computing the thirtieth day after the *teste* of the writ. They might err in naming the wrong presiding burghs. A whole district was thrown into complete confusion because the Court of Session temporarily deprived Jedburgh of its status as a royal burgh.<sup>2</sup> If a faction fight broke out in a town council over the choice of a delegate, each faction might choose a delegate, or one faction might hide the burgh seal, without which no commission to a delegate was valid. The law was not clear as to what was to be done if a delegate died or could not appear at the election meeting.

In practice, the burgh electors, both the councillors

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and the delegates whom they chose to elect the district member, were in almost every case the mere tools of some great noble, political manager, or man of wealth. Most of the districts had acquired such 'patrons' long before Dundas's time. If a contest occurred in a burgh, it was because two such worthies were fighting for the mastery. In such contests, the sinews of war were very often simply and solely pounds, shillings, and pence, and the 'patron' who could outspend his rival won. Although there are very few traces of bribery with hard cash in county elections, there is no doubt that it played a considerable part in burgh elections.<sup>1</sup> Since no qualifications at all were required of the delegates who elected the members for the burgh districts, it was quite a common practice for the 'patron' to get his candidate for Parliament elected delegate from one of the burghs. The candidate could then go to the presiding burgh and vote for himself at the election. All things considered, not more than fifty persons were electors of the Scottish burgh members of Parliament in any real sense. Probably not one town councillor out of the whole thirteen hundred cast an independent vote.<sup>2</sup>

For one hundred and twenty-five years these were the rules and regulations by which Scotland chose her representatives in the British Parliament. With a population well over a million in 1800, she had less than four thousand voters and less than four hundred inhabitants who had any real influence on election returns. Such was the system and such were the tools with which Dundas worked to build up a political ascendancy in Scotland which has had no parallel either before or since his time and which was the foundation of his political power as a member of the Cabinet and as administrator of British India.

<sup>1</sup> *Infra*, pp. 222, 256, 269.

<sup>2</sup> This account of the burghs is based on: Wight, *op. cit.*; Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.; Porritt, E., *Unreformed House of Commons*, vol. ii.



## II

### DUNDAS'S POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP

1775-83<sup>1</sup>

UNFORTUNATELY we know very little of Dundas's early activities as an election manager. That they must have been many and various is apparent from the few hints we get regarding them in the correspondence of his older relatives.<sup>2</sup> From the time that he became a Member of the Faculty of Advocates he seems to have been much interested in political preferment. In the 1760's his sister Christy wrote that Henry made it a point to cultivate the good opinion of the burgh councillors on his trips through the North. He supped and drank with the burgesses of the small towns, who rewarded the clever lad with their confidence and found him a boon companion and shrewd adviser.<sup>3</sup> During the few years when he displayed that leaning towards Whiggism to which we have already referred, he took a prominent part in Edinburgh election contests.<sup>4</sup> In 1768 he was supporting Sir Alexander Gilmour in the Whig interest against Lord Bute.<sup>5</sup> There is, therefore, little truth in the remark of Sir John

<sup>1</sup> The following account of Dundas's activities as a political manager is based chiefly on three sources: the Dundas correspondence, *The Political State of Scotland, 1788* (ed. C. E. Adam, printed Edinr. 1887), and the *Official Return of the Members of Parliament* (Parl. Paper lxii. 1878). The problem is one of correlating information gained from all three. Every effort has been made not to assume without sufficient evidence that any Scotchman's political opinions as reported in 1788 were the same at other dates. It is often impossible to give complete references for an opinion that such and such a person is or is not part of the Dundas 'interest', but such opinions are always based on a definite impression gained from a sufficient number of significant facts. Where there is reasonable doubt, the individual's political status must be considered uncertain. Every effort has also been made to avoid inaccuracies due to the extraordinary number of Scotchmen who either bore the same given and surnames or assumed the wife's surname on marriage. Although full details of what Dundas did in each case are not available, we can nevertheless get an insight into the methods used and the results attained.

<sup>2</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb., *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., Fam. Alb., pp. 1-4 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Supra*, pp. 2, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Lovat-Fraser, J. A., *Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville*, p. 3; Mure, Wm., ed., *Caldwell Papers*, Part II, i. 283.

Sinclair, the somewhat eccentric compiler of *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, that 'Lord Melville, when he first became a Member of Parliament, never thought of entering into the field of politics, he was considered merely as an able Scots lawyer'.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Dundas was active in politics years before he entered Parliament. The task of maintaining the political 'interest' of his family in Scotland made him aware of the advantages which accrued in London to the Scottish politician who could control several counties and royal burghs in North Britain.

Dundas's Whiggism was but a passing phase. The rapidity with which it evaporated is evidenced by the eagerness with which he thrust himself upon the attention of Lord North in 1771 as a possible candidate to turn out the very man whom he had supported three years earlier, Sir Alexander Gilmour, the member for Midlothian (Edinburgh county). As we have hitherto pointed out, the reasons for his attachment to Lord North are not entirely clear, but it is hardly unjust to suggest that they were simply those of political expediency. In all probability he realized that Lord North was the man of the future in 1771, as he realized that Pitt was in a like position in 1783-4. The language of his election petition to Lord North clearly shows that he was afraid that statesman would not know who he was. After referring to the services of his father, half-brother, and grandfather, Dundas continued:

Your lordship can without any difficulty be fully informed as to these particulars by any person from Scotland acquainted with the state of this county and the inclinations of gentlemen with regard to their representation in Parliament. . . . Before the expiry of the present Parliament, I shall have been nine years in his Majesty's service and shall be glad, if, by being in Parliament, I can be more extensively useful in the service of my country ['Government' crossed out and 'my country' inserted in Dundas's own hand]. I flatter myself that none who are acquainted with the principles I hold with

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair, Sir John, *Correspondence*, i. 104.

regard to Government . . . will entertain any doubt what will be the line I shall pursue. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The expected election did not occur, and Dundas was forced to wait until 1774, when, having already made himself known to the Administration, he successfully contested Midlothian with Government support. His appointment to the Lord Advocateship in May of the following year reveals the confidence which Lord North and his colleagues then had in his possibilities as a political manager for Scotland. In order to justify the trust reposed in him, Dundas began at once to build up his family 'interest' far beyond the confines of his native Midlothian.

In the existing Parliament he could probably count upon the friendship of about ten of the Scottish members. Ralph Abercromby (Clackmannan)<sup>2</sup> and John Lockhart Ross (Lanark)<sup>3</sup> were closely connected with his family. The Gordons, of whom three, Cosmo (Nairn), Lord William (Elgin), and Lord Adam (Kincardine) were M.P.s, were unlikely to be hostile to a young man whose mother had been a Gordon. Dundas must also have found William Hamilton-Nisbet (Haddington), James Murray (Perth), and John Pringle (Selkirk)<sup>4</sup> friendly. As for enemies, there were in the House many representatives of families politically hostile in Scotland to the Dundases of Arniston. The town of Edinburgh was controlled and represented by Sir Lawrence Dundas, of the elder branch of the family, always jealous of the Arniston branch.<sup>5</sup> His relative, Sir Thomas Dundas, represented the Orkneys and Shetland. In Banff and Elgin, the Earl of Fife and the Hon. Arthur Duff were certain to be unfriendly.<sup>6</sup> Hostility might be expected from Sir William Augustus Cuninghame (Linlithgow), John Crauford (Renfrew),<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., North Corr., N.L.S.

<sup>2</sup> Mother, a Dundas.

<sup>3</sup> Friend, later connected by marriage to a niece of Dundas's.

<sup>4</sup> These men all received political favours, and are correspondents of Dundas. See maps of each Parliament in the appendix.

<sup>5</sup> *V. infra*, pp. 195-7.

<sup>6</sup> *V. infra*, pp. 206 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *V. infra*, p. 228.

and, above all, from William Maule, Earl Panmure (Forfar), whose successor many years later attempted to set fire to Dundas's portrait in the Forfar Council House; although in the 'most aggressive of after-dinner moods', his hand was too unsteady to keep the torch alight. The event was thus commemorated:

To vent his spleen on Melville's patriot name,  
Maule gave his picture to the ruthless flame,  
Nor knew that this was Melville's fame to raise,  
Censure from Maule is Melville's greatest praise.<sup>1</sup>

There was, therefore, a formidable opposition to contend with and we may be sure that Dundas busied himself much with political activity in the interval between the General Election of 1774 and that of 1780. We have, however, only one opportunity to watch him at work. On the death of the member for Fifeshire in 1775, Andrew Stuart wrote to the new Lord Advocate of his wish to bring in his nephew, Sir John Henderson.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Murray, the Solicitor-General, declared for Henderson as soon as his friend Sir John Halket had declined to stand. There were two other candidates in the field, a Mr. Oswald, supported by the Wemyss family, and Col. Skene of Skene (later closely connected politically with the Earl of Fife). Dundas's difficulties as manager for the Government were further increased by the carelessness of the Duke of Argyle in declaring for Skene before he was aware of Henderson's candidacy.<sup>3</sup> Even with the rectification of this error on Skene's withdrawing in favour of Oswald, Dundas and the Solicitor-General could not command enough votes to carry the county, although Andrew Stuart wrote to Dundas:

He [Henderson] will certainly carry the county if he has the good fortune to be supported by your family on this occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Oswald was elected.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, Oswald, very

<sup>1</sup> Reid, Allen, *Royal Burgh of Forfar*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., A. Stuart to D., Dec. 28, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, A. Stuart to Sir Robt. Henderson, Jan. 8, 1776 (copy).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, A. Stuart to D., Dec. 28, 1775.

<sup>5</sup> *Official Return.*

probably at the behest of Dundas, accepted an appointment as auditor of the exchequer in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> In the new election, Skene was returned, but the contest was close enough to justify Sir John Henderson in petitioning the House of Commons. As a result of the hearing of this petition, Skene was unseated on February 7, 1780, but won the seat again in the General Election of the same year.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of these Fife by-elections does not lie in the fact that Dundas failed. It lies in the lessons which he must have learned from the experience. For one thing, he must have learned that Sir John Henderson was not a proper candidate for Government to support in Fife. Henceforth, Dundas never supported Sir John in Fife or elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> For another, he must have been convinced that the control of Fife depended on *both* the Wemyss 'interest' and the Earl of Fife's 'interest'. To attach the former to Government was a comparatively simple matter. The auditorship of the exchequer was supplemented with West India appointments.<sup>4</sup> It is significant that both Oswald and Col. Wemyss were strongly ministerial in 1788. To attach the latter, the Earl of Fife's, 'interest' was a far more difficult task, to which, as will appear later, Dundas devoted a great deal of attention.

The General Election of October 1780 was the first in which Dundas, as Lord Advocate, exercised his talents as Government manager for the whole of Scotland. After a full summer spent at home 'strenuously electioneering',<sup>5</sup> he had no reason to be downhearted over the result, even though several notable names appeared in the enemy ranks, the foremost among them being Sir John Sinclair (Caithness), Gilbert Elliot, the future Lord Minto, Governor-General of India (Roxburgh), and William Adam (Wigton burghs).

<sup>1</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>3</sup> *V. infra*, p. 275, and also letter in my possession, D. to Pitt, Feb. 1802, for history of Dundas's connexion with Fifeshire.

<sup>4</sup> Adam, C. E., *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., Fam. Alb. in possession of Lady Melville, p. 11.

The Dundas following in the new Parliament made up in numbers what it lacked in distinction. Thirteen members, eight from the counties and five from the burghs, formed a solid Dundas 'interest'. Of the remaining thirty-two members, only twelve were firmly attached to the opposition.<sup>1</sup>

This election provides an excellent example of the legal chicanery to which the old Scottish election laws gave rise. Dumbartonshire was contested by Capt. George Keith Elphinstone (the future admiral and conqueror of the Cape of Good Hope) and Lord Frederick Campbell, scion of the Duke of Argyle. In his attempt to break into a county usually completely subservient to the Dukes of Argyle, who seem to have been steady supporters of North, and, later, of Pitt, Elphinstone had 'created' more than a score of freeholders to vote for him. The sheriff, Sir James Colquhoun of Luss, checkmated him by fixing the date of election twenty-four hours before Elphinstone's new votes were legally 'mature' under the statute which provided that a year must elapse between enrolment and voting. Not to be outdone, Elphinstone sent to Edinburgh for Henry Erskine, the able Whig lawyer. Erskine with the aid of two other able orators from the capital succeeded, by challenging vote after vote, in protracting the election meeting until midnight. On the stroke of twelve, Elphinstone's voters claimed recognition, only to be met with a counter-barrage of legal erudition from the Argyle lawyers, who claimed that an election was presumed to end on the day it began. The ballot was finally taken at 5 a.m. The chair refused to accept the Elphinstone votes, and returned his friend Lord Frederick Campbell as elected by a majority of nine. The matter ended with a compromise between the candidates.<sup>2</sup> Lord Frederick persuaded the Duke of Argyle to return him for Argyle instead of Dumbarton.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return*. See maps in Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Irving, J., *Book of Dumbartonshire*, p. 335.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return*.

The Dundas 'interest' was increased in this election of 1780 as a result of an alliance with the Duke of Buccleuch. The following correspondence in regard to the politics of Edinburgh shows clearly the foundations of that connexion. In later years, Buccleuch was one of Dundas's most intimate friends, a friend whose whole-hearted support could always be counted upon. Together they formed the most formidable political power in Edinburgh and the vicinity. Other noble families, the Hopes, the Gordons, the Montgomeries, even when in political alliance with Dundas, were occasionally hesitant, or exacted a definite price for their favours. The Duke of Buccleuch followed him blindly. In Edinburgh Town, Dundas indeed had cause to congratulate himself on a victory. Although its ultimate conquest from Sir Lawrence Dundas, his hostile relative, was hastened by that gentleman's death in 1781,<sup>1</sup> there can be no doubt that the Dundases of Arniston would have carried it within a few years. Dundas at this time seems to have been to some extent a pupil of John Robinson, Lord North's astute political manager for England. After his failure to oust Sir Lawrence in 1780, Dundas wrote to Robinson: 'The Town of Edinburgh is, I thank God, almost the only place in Scotland where you had the opportunity of marking your disapprobation.'<sup>2</sup> The election, in fact, was similar to that in Dumbartonshire, close, hotly contested, with much challenging of votes, and much animosity on account of a trade-gild *versus* Town Council feud. William Miller, Dundas's nominee, was actually returned. Sir Lawrence, however, at once petitioned, and was seated March 21, 1781.<sup>3</sup> His death in September was an unforeseen stroke of luck for Dundas, who at once wrote to John Robinson:

I have your letter relative to Sir Alex. Gilmour. . . . No idea could be more wild than that of his thinking of repre-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Abergavenny MSS., 10th Rept., App. VI (1887), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Craik, Sir H., *Century of Scottish History*, ii. 67, and *Official Return*.

senting the Town of Edinburgh. The politics of Edinburgh on Sir Lawrence's death have taken a very desirable turn, the only one that could be wished, unless they would have chosen Mr. Miller, which, as the irritation of parties formed upon occasion of the former contest has not yet subsided, I scarcely expected. . . . Mr. Miller . . . did not show any inclination to enter upon a contest such as the last, which had been attended with many disagreeable circumstances. . . . Under this predicament, I determined to pay no court to any of the electors till I could perceive what way they were pointing. Two candidates were talked of, Col. Dundas now in America, the other, Mr. Hunter-Blair, one of the magistrates. If the former, altho' individually a most excellent young man, it would have marked so strongly an intention to perpetuate the seat in Sir Lawrence's family against the Duke of Buccleugh's interest, that we should have opposed him at any trouble and expense, and we should certainly have beat him by adopting either the Provost or Mr. Hunter-Blair. But, as hunting foxes, shooting partridges, and laughing with my friends is a much pleasanter business than borough electioneering, you may believe I was much relieved by receiving a message to inform me that Mr. Hunter-Blair would be unanimously chosen, if my friends would concur with him, and that he was to come in under the previous declaration of acting cordially along with Govt. . . . I believe him perfectly sincere in all this [his attachment to Dundas and the Duke of Buccleugh]; at the same time, *the party by which he is chosen and which in truth is the party left by Sir Lawrence Dundas must be broke, and the Town of Edinburgh brought under some respectable Patronage on which Government can rely*, for they must not be permitted to govern the Town by a Knot of themselves without the interposition of some such Patron, for, if they do, the first good opportunity that offers, some able individual among them who leads the rest will sell them to any rich person like Sir Lawrence whom vanity or a desire of being in Parliament might prompt to make the purchase. If the Duke of Buccleugh chuses to be that Patron in connection with Government, every circumstance unquestionably points him out as the properest of all persons: accordingly I have intimated this to Mr. Hunter-Blair and told him plainly that he must lay his account that the interest of the Duke of Buccleugh in Edinburgh is what Government will



continue to support. . . . This being steadily adhered to, you may be perfectly assured that before twelve months is over Mr. Hunter-Blair himself and the whole Council of Edinburgh will be compleatly and permanently placed, as they used to be, in the hands of Government. So much for Edinburgh politics which I shall conclude with one reflexion upon the vanity of all human ambition. When Sir Lawrence Dundas laid out twenty thousand pounds to build a house in Edinburgh and submitted for these fifteen years to every species of disagreeable meanness to establish an interest in the Town of Edinburgh, did he ever imagine that he would not only die without a coronet, but, that within a few months of his breath being out, there should not remain in any of his family the vestige of that Interest which cost him so much? And yet in truth, that will be exactly the case. My hunting horses are at the door, and the morning breaking beautifully up, so adieu. [*Italics the author's.*]<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was that the town of Edinburgh was brought under the Dundas sway to remain there, although not without some difficulty, until the days of Dundas's impeachment in 1805-6.

The foundation of Dundas's control of Ayrshire was also laid before 1784. In this county, the exigencies of the Dundas despotism continually thwarted the political ambitions of James Boswell. In April 1782, Doctor Johnson's biographer wrote the following letter to Dundas:

[Edinburgh,  
April 20, 1782.]

My Dear Lord [Advocate],

If I was ready to renew our old hereditary friendship some time ago, I should be much readier now. Your Lordship is the son of President Arniston, and the grandson of Sir William Gordon, with both of whom my father was in the most cordial intimacy. My grandfather indeed was in great friendship with your father. From my infancy I have been educated with these good impressions; and while I saw the friendship of our families continued, I hoped it should last for ages.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, D. to J. Robinson, dated Oct. 8, 1781 (copy).

After my father had long ceased from Politicks and after I had with his permission warmly taken the side of the ancient and respectable interest in Ayrshire, your Lordship knows who prevailed with him to make extraordinary exertions in favour of a candidate who '*up-started*', a candidate who, however plausible had certainly given me reason to have a shabby opinion of him in a little pecuniary question which he has since refused to submit to the arbitration of your Lordship. I was thus not only thwarted in my general wishes for old interest in elections and crossed in personal antipathy but rendered insignificant in my own county.

I appeal to your Lordship's own feelings which I can fully trust, if all this was not hard to bear, at the best time of one's life. It was the harder that I was altogether dependent on my Father with a wife and children. And was there any wonder that it should estrange me from your family?

After years of unnatural distance which I could not help regretting from my heart, I was fortunate enough to become convinced that Politicks was the strongest poison to the human mind and would insensibly instigate excellent men to do very wrong things. I excused your Lordship's ardent ambitious conduct. I upon my honour forgave you, and with all sincerity, I renewed that social intercourse which should never have been interrupted.

I depend upon our old hereditary friendship. I depend upon that generosity of spirit which prompts to make reparation to those whom we have any way injured (I indeed depend much upon this in your Lordship's breast) that henceforth you will be disposed to give me your kind assistance, and, what I shall highly value, your able advice in my endeavours to obtain promotion, of which I flatter myself I shall not be thought less worthy than others. I have the honour to be with real respect

My dear Lord

Your affectionate, humble servant  
James Boswell.<sup>1</sup>

This is a letter difficult of interpretation, but the main conclusions to be drawn from it are sufficiently clear. Ayrshire was represented in the Parliament of

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Boswell letters, N.L.S., copied from the original. This letter has been printed in Tinker, C. B., *Letters of Boswell*, ii. 523.

1774 by Sir Adam Ferguson,<sup>1</sup> the well-known Scottish philosopher and historian, whose connexion with Dundas and Pitt in later years was most clearly marked. It would seem certain that he is the 'up-start' candidate to whom Boswell refers. At the General Election of 1780 Hugh Montgomerie,<sup>2</sup> heir of the Earl of Eglinton, was returned, but was unseated by the House in April 1781, when Sir Adam Ferguson was declared duly elected for Ayrshire.<sup>3</sup> Dundas, therefore, had been trying since 1774 to hold the seat for Sir Adam against the Eglinton 'interest', which Boswell describes as 'ancient and respectable'. In 1780-1 Dundas had just barely succeeded. Subsequent correspondence, to be referred to later, shows that neither Dundas nor the Eglintons could afford to gratify Boswell's political ambitions. As was his custom in such cases, Dundas pursued a policy of compromise and made a treaty with the Eglintons which provided for a political alliance and for the representation of the two interests in alternate Parliaments. There was no room for Boswell in such an arrangement.

Dundas had now laid the foundations of his power both in England and in Scotland. He could enter on the period of political confusion following the fall of Lord North secure in the knowledge that his support would be of great value to any administration. He already completely controlled the politics of Midlothian and the surrounding counties. He had captured the town of Edinburgh. There is good reason for thinking that at least half of the Scottish Members of Parliament were warmly disposed towards him. Yet these were merely years of apprenticeship. He had worked in collaboration with John Robinson. He had displayed that tendency to serve political expediency at the expense of other considerations which caused his enemies to speak of him as a 'trimmer', a veritable

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 255.

Vicar of Bray'.<sup>1</sup> He had developed an efficacious method of attack on any county or burgh and had come to realize that further progress depended on such political alliances as that with the Duke of Buccleuch. Much remained to be done in that line, especially in the Highlands. This was the task to which he set himself as soon as the younger Pitt was firmly in power in England.

<sup>1</sup> Sichel, W., *Sheridan*, i. 158. See, also, anon. doc. in P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, as follows:

Glasgow, 1st year of the  
French Republic.

Honourable Sir,

I embrace the first opportunity of sending the enclosed to be by you laid before his Majesty. It is a specimen of the sentiments of the people here for about ten thousand are members of it. . . . I remain, honourable Sir,

A North Briton.

Fame, sound the downfall of Monarchy  
and the Elevation of Democracy. Amen!!!  
Henry, be King, wha' like, be ye Vicar of Bray  
Wha' wants me!!!

### III

#### THE FORMATION OF THE DUNDAS 'INTEREST' 1783-90

**D**URING all the changes in the administration which followed the first fall of Lord North early in 1782 Dundas seems to have kept his Scottish following intact. The key to his refusal to give up the Lord Advocateship until August 1783, several months after the 'odious' Fox-North coalition had come into power, is his undoubted conviction that his 'interest' in Scotland would be greatly weakened should he cease to hold so important a post. He was not the man to endanger the influence which he had built up in Scotland by relinquishing office too easily, nor could Fox afford to offend one who had proved so valuable to Lord North in the past. Even when Henry Erskine finally became Lord Advocate, Dundas not only told Erskine not to give himself the trouble of buying a new gown which he would have so little chance to use,<sup>1</sup> but he did his best to keep in office those of his former Scottish colleagues who had helped build up his influence. In this he was not successful. Ilay Campbell, the Solicitor-General, wrote to him that he was the only one of the old group still in office. At the end of August the Whigs had made things so intolerable that Campbell insisted upon resigning, apparently much against Dundas's wishes. 'I should be sorry', he writes on September 1, 'if you continued to differ with me about my resignation of the Solicitor-General-ship. . . . The dismissal of the Crown mandate from above will satisfy you that nothing less than a total change of system was the object in view. . . . Had I continued in office, I must have had the appearance of aiding and countenancing every political scheme, which the Whig party may chuse to adopt in this country, and it is

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, J. A., *Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville*, pp. 13-14; Fergusson, A., *Henry Erskine, his kinsfolk and his times*, p. 241.

already avowed that they do not mean to be idle, either as politicians or as public officers. In short I thought it much better to leave the field clear to them and my mind still tells me that I judged rightly.<sup>1</sup>

Having no intention of 'leaving the field clear' to the Whigs, Dundas soon began his campaign to increase his influence in the North. Three weeks before the King succeeded in causing the defeat of Fox's India Bill in the Lords, the defeat which enabled Pitt to become Prime Minister on December 19, the Duke of Gordon unexpectedly received a long and very confidential letter from Dundas. The Duke replied on December 6 gratefully accepting Dundas's offer to be his political guide and mentor, and promised that not even his charming and eccentric Duchess, whose doings provided one of the chief topics of conversation in London 'society', should see this letter which had given him 'a new light totally in political matters'.<sup>2</sup> Absorbed in the task of paying off his huge debts by re-organizing his estates, the Duke, who lived at Gordon Castle because he had 'too much Scotch pride' to go to London and be obliged to live beyond his means, was only too willing to resign himself into the hands of a political expert for the present. 'I am just now favoured', he writes, 'with your long letter which I shall always esteem as a particular mark of your attention. . . . You have long known that I am the very worst politician in the world, and that I never could give much attention to politicks, but since I have taken the lead in the management of my own affairs, I have attended to nothing else. . . . In regard to politicks, yours is the first letter I have received on the subject, as none of my friends either in or out of Parliament have wrote me a single word, neither do I know what line they are to take. I was therefore totally ignorant of the *carte du pays* until I heard from you.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Campbell to D., Sept. 1, 1783 (original).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., Duke of G. to D., Dec. 6, 1783 (original).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

After stating that his relations with the coalition have consisted in asking Lord North for a favour or two for friends, the Duke concludes: 'I always found Lord North very friendly and I confess I have a great regard and attachment for him. . . . As to myself my object is certainly a peerage and that His Majesty has long known, but I have never hinted at it to the present Ministry, nor have I asked them for any one thing for myself. . . . I shall always be happy to have your advice both in politicks as well as in my private affairs, and if you will take the trouble, I will be very much obliged.'<sup>1</sup> Thus Dundas began to take under his wing one of the most powerful noblemen in the north of Scotland, a nobleman who had a vast political 'interest' in at least three counties. This must have been one of the first letters which passed between them, for it begins 'My dear Sir'. Later the Duke always wrote 'Dear Dundas'.

With lesser noblemen, Dundas's methods were no less effective. The first months of 1784 were, of course, filled with electioneering with a view to the approaching dissolution of Parliament. The case of Lord Napier, later a steady supporter of Dundas's nominees in the elections of the sixteen Scottish peers,<sup>2</sup> is typical. Their connexion began in January 1784, when Napier, though not 'personally acquainted' with Dundas, wrote to him concerning his own situation. In the army since 1774, Napier had spent three years in America and had purchased a company in an infantry regiment. He and his four sisters received a pension of £300. His total income did not exceed £276 and he had to pay the interest on the £1,500 borrowed to pay for his company. He therefore wanted Dundas to arrange half-pay and a larger pension for him.<sup>3</sup> From such men as he the backbone of the Dundas influence was formed. As matters turned out, Dundas and Pitt probably got most of what they wanted from the Scottish peers in 1784. Coutts, the great banker, a Whig sympathizer

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Laing MSS. ii. 461, Univ. of Edinr.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 133, N.L.S., Napier to D., Jan. 9, 1784 (original).

at this time, wrote: 'I understand the ministry will get their wish as to the peers which at first seemed uncertain; so that I suspect my friend Lord Cassilis will be out.'<sup>1</sup> Lord Cassilis was not 'out',<sup>2</sup> but there are only four peers pronouncedly hostile to Dundas among the elected sixteen.

The electioneering for the famous election of April 1784 was not done with any convinced spirit of success. The situation did not warrant that. In the county of Aberdeen, for example, a lawyer who had bought a vote on Lord Fife's behalf wrote in January: 'The Aberdeen election will be a hard run battle, but any candidate with tolerable influence of his own must carry it, if supported by Lord Fife. The Duke of Gordon, who left this town yesterday after a stay of three weeks said he should give himself little trouble, which I doubt, unless these great men understand each other, in which case they may put in whom they please.'<sup>3</sup> Dundas did not conduct his own campaign in Midlothian as if the result were a foregone conclusion. He was most grateful to the Earl of Abercorn for refusing to support a request to oppose him.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he felt it necessary to ask the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to allow a voter to come to Scotland to vote in Midlothian.<sup>5</sup> There is no question that he exerted himself to the full. Coutts, who wished Pitt to court the Whigs, writes in March: 'The Advocate Dundas will be a great operator in Scotch affairs, and I think Mr. Pitt is in more danger from his friends than his enemies.'<sup>6</sup> Lord Sydney's note to Pitt, 'I enclose you the list of the field officers in India. I believe *three* are as many English or Irish names as there are among them',<sup>7</sup> is ample

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge, E. H., *Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker*, i. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Beatson, R., *Chronological Register of Parliament*, iii. 139-40.

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, D. to Abercorn, Jan. 18, 1784 (copy). 'I certainly would have no title to complain of an opposition, nor would it vary my sentiments of well-founded respect towards any person who thought it right to countenance it.'

<sup>5</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Rutland MSS. iii. 88, D. to Rutland, Apr. 13, 1784.

<sup>6</sup> Coleridge, *op. cit.*, i. 177, Coutts to Crawford, Mar. 19, 1784.

<sup>7</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *op. cit.*, p. 210.



evidence that the India reservoir was being pumped dry in 1784. There is no question also that Dundas, after the election, set his face against any Scot who had trafficked with the Whigs. Joseph Maclaurin, anxious for a place among the Ordinary Lords of Session, wrote to Dundas on April 29 a long and involved letter in an attempt to explain away his slight connexion with Erskine and Sir Thomas Dundas, who had offered him a place on the Bench when Lord Westhall died. Maclaurin claimed that he had refused the Solicitor-Generalship out of regard for Dundas, who, he realized, would soon return to power.<sup>1</sup> When Dundas replied coolly to his protestations of loyalty, Maclaurin wrote again, but all to no avail. It was not until 1787 that he became a Lord of Session.<sup>2</sup>

The results of the election of 1784 in Scotland show clearly that it would have, indeed, been unwise for Dundas and Pitt to have approached the contest in any spirit of undue confidence. In spite of his hard work, Dundas seems merely to have held his own. If we are to judge from what we know of the political sympathies of the forty-five men who were then elected, Dundas's gains in the counties were set off by losses in the burghs. If the uncertain seats are divided equally between him and the enemy, the Dundas 'interest' musters only fifteen counties and seven districts of burghs, leaving fifteen counties and eight districts of burghs to persons hostile to Dundas.<sup>3</sup> Although it is fairly certain that a majority of these latter, for example, the Earl of Fife,<sup>4</sup> supported Pitt quite steadily, one cannot say positively that Dundas controlled more than half the Scottish members at this time. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Dundas soon bent all his energies to continuing the negotiations which he had begun with the Duke of Gordon in December 1783.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Maclaurin to D., Apr. 29, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Haydn, *Book of Dignities*, p. 415.

<sup>3</sup> See map in Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *op. cit.*, *passim*. For others, see Robinson, J., *Parliamentary Papers*, ed. W. T. Laprade, section iii.

The dominant 'interests' in the north-eastern counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray (Elgin), and in the Elgin District of Burghs (Elgin, Banff, Cullen, Kintore, Inverurie) were those of the Duke of Gordon, the Earl of Fife, Lord Kintore, Lord Findlater, Sir James Grant, and the Moray Association led by Alexander Brodie of Brodie, a 'nabob' whose fortune had been made in Madras. In 1784 the Gordon and Fife 'interests' were pitted against each other. Lord Findlater and Sir James Grant were attached to Lord Fife. Lord Kintore, who controlled the burghs, favoured the Duke of Gordon. The Moray Association strongly opposed Lord Fife, yet did not consider itself bound to the Gordons.<sup>1</sup> This was the situation which confronted Dundas, who, as we have seen, had already affiliated himself somewhat closely with the Gordons. If he could effect a compromise between these conflicting 'interests', he would firmly control another large section of his country. Compromise, however, was kept in the background until it was fully demonstrated at the by-election for Aberdeen in February 1786 that Dundas, with the aid of the Duke of Gordon, could not defeat Lord Fife's nominee.

The death of Alexander Garden of Troup,<sup>2</sup> who had represented Aberdeen for many years, gave the opportunity for this trial of strength. Lord Fife asked Pitt for ministerial neutrality<sup>3</sup> and even conversed with Dundas at Christmas 1785 in an attempt to get him to be satisfied with a promise by the Fife candidate, Mr. Skene, to support the Government. This promise was half-hearted.<sup>4</sup> Dundas and the Duke of Gordon put up one of Dundas's closest friends, James Ferguson of Pitfour. Their correspondence shows that they spared no effort to elect him. The Duke was most anxious about the validity of votes which he had 'made' for his

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., Duke of G. to D., Mar. 24, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Rose Papers*, p. 32, Wm. Rose to Fife, Apr. 13, 1787.

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relatives.<sup>1</sup> It was indeed a spirited contest, as this  
election ballad well shows:

I sing the election 'twixt Skene and Pitfour,  
My song shall be sweet though my subject be sour;  
I'll tell you what Barons and Beauties were there,  
And hit you their characters all to a hair.

There was a rich peer of an Irish creation,\*  
A commoner here tho' a Lord of the Nation,  
And because he could vote without favour or fear,  
They voted this noble Lord into the chair.

And there was a Lord† who had lately succeeded  
To a *Troop* of new friends, which he very much needed,  
But this Lord being old said not much *pro* or *con*,  
Yet he still shook his head, as the voting went on.

There too was the Lord of the Protestant mob,‡  
Who came a long way to assist at the job,  
And yet when he came no assistance could grant,  
For no oath he would take but the old Covenant.

And there were some Knights of famous renown,  
With Generals and Colonels all mustered in town,  
For, tho' the red coats are forbid at elections,  
There are colours besides that will suit all complexions.

And there was an Englishman§ married in haste  
To an heiress that suited him, just to his taste,  
Yet his right of attendance at Court was not clear,  
So they sent him to dance it at home for a year.

And there were the Gordons of every degree,  
As stately and gentle as Gordons should be,  
But how many were true or false to their chief,  
Perhaps I could tell but you'd not give belief.

And there were the Duffs,|| all arranged on one side,  
All true to the Dun Cow, whate'er might betide;  
Their chief they are sure would always prevail,  
For ten of majority never can fail.

\* Lord Fife. † Lord Gardenstone, of Troup. ‡ Lord George Gordon.  
§ John Byron, married Miss Gordon of Gight; father of Lord Byron. || Fife's  
relatives.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., Jan. 27, 1786.

And a joyful day it was to be sure,  
 For the victuals were good and the claret was pure  
 While the rabble roared out—such roaring was never—  
 'For Skene and Lord George, beef and porter for ever.'<sup>1</sup>

The defeat of such a close friend as Ferguson was a bitter blow to Dundas and the Duke. In March 1786 his Grace wrote to Dundas of the 'little unlucky circumstances which gave Lord Fife a temporary success in Aberdeenshire'.<sup>2</sup> Having heard that the Moray Association would not agree to attack Lord Fife unless some positive agreement was made with them, the Duke caused a political survey of the northern counties to be drawn up. In this interesting document, which was submitted to Dundas, three possible courses of action were set forth. An alliance between the Duke and Lord Fife would carry the counties of Banff and Moray (Elgin), and, in all probability, Aberdeen as well. It would also carry the Elgin District of Burghs provided the Duke secured the burghs of Kintore and Inverurie from Lord Kintore. If, on the other hand, the Duke should choose to continue in opposition to Lord Fife, Lord Findlater, and the Grants, and to ally himself with 'nabob' Brodie and the Moray Association, he might be able to carry, after a hard battle, the three counties of Banff, Moray, and Aberdeen. In such an event, success would be purchased 'with hazard and expense, besides obligations to various individuals'. The advantages were, nevertheless, great, for if victorious the Duke would permanently curtail Lord Fife's power and influence in all three counties. As a third possible plan of campaign, the Duke suggested that, if Dundas could find means to win over the Findlaters and Grants, the chances of defeating Lord Fife in three counties were immeasurably better, not to mention the fact that the Duke and Sir James Grant could together control a fourth county, Inverness-shire. Under this plan the Elgin burghs were also to be

<sup>1</sup> In Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. to the Duke of Gordon, Mar. 24, 1786.

secured. The support of the Grants in Moray would enable the wealthy Mr. Brodie to make 'an Oriental attack' on Lord Fife's burgh of Banff, while the Duke would persuade Lord Kintore to deliver the burghs of Kintore and Inverurie.

Although these proposals were sent to Dundas in the early spring of 1786, he apparently took no action upon them for over ten months. When we do hear of them again at the beginning of 1787, it is not extraordinary to find him working for the solution first suggested, namely, some form of coalition with Lord Fife. Lord Fife's correspondence with his factor, William Rose of Moncoffer, reveals this growing *rapprochement* between Fife and the Pitt Administration. In April 1785 Lord Fife and Dundas were thoroughly hostile. At least Fife thought Dundas had abetted an election petition against him. He then wrote:

I happened yesterday to be called on the Ballot which I always attend. I was sitting just behind Mr. Dundas when I rose to excuse myself, having a petition against me . . . on which he turned about 'Good God, Lord Fife, a petition against you'. I answered with a smile, 'Oh, to be sure you do not know that', on which he vowed he had never heard of it. 'What', says he, 'Is this perfect madness?' So I only continued my smile. I hope we shall be heard the fifth of April.<sup>1</sup> At the Aberdeen election, although they gave each other no quarter, Fife and Dundas had thawed out sufficiently to converse on the question of Skene's supporting the Cabinet.<sup>2</sup> Fife, who had always hated Fox, became, as time passed, more and more enthusiastic about Pitt personally. This made it impossible for Dundas to follow any other course than that of alliance and conciliation, even had he wished to do so.

Dundas therefore spent the greater part of the year 1787 in reconciling the Duke of Gordon to a political coalition with Lord Fife. It was no mean task, as the following extract from one of Lord Fife's letters in February 1787 clearly indicates:

<sup>1</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Rose Papers*, p. 32.

I wrote to you [Rose] that I some days ago met the Duke of Gordon, and that he was sulky and in his usual. Yesterday, I was crossing the street not twenty yards from him, and down went his eyes and on he went without the least notice. By chance in coming home I met Mr. Dundas, so I fairly stated the Duke of G.'s temper and how no independent feeling mind could carry on business or any communication with it. I daresay he must wish peace . . . but then that horrid violent *woman* [the Duchess] speaks no truth. I must act with coolness and temper. . . . We will wait a little and see if this agreeable man [the Duke] change nature. The Duchess is going on like a perfect *Divle*.<sup>1</sup>

Ten days later the situation was worse. Fife wrote to his factor that the Duke had decided to run Lord Huntly, heir of the Duke, for Aberdeenshire, Ferguson for Banff, and to support the Moray Association in Moray. He concludes: 'I shall see Mr. Dundas again soon. I really believe from the venom of the Female and the sulkiness of the Male, he does not find it easy to do anything with them which is contrary to their humour. She is leading a horrid life here.'<sup>2</sup>

The Duke of Gordon would have been even more incensed had he known of the secret negotiations which Dundas carried on with the Grants through the Earl of Fife during the spring of 1787. Early in April Dundas outlined his desires to aid Sir James Grant, in a long conversation with Lord Fife. 'I need not tell you', wrote Fife to William Rose, his factor, 'how necessary it is to keep everything secret.'<sup>3</sup> Late in June Henry Mackenzie, author of *The Man of Feeling*, wrote to Sir James Grant:

General Grant is here just now on his way north. You will have heard that he is to come in for Sutherland. *Entre nous*, I understand from him, there are arrangements talked of above for the Northern Counties in which Mr. Dundas talked very kindly of you, *owned that you had not been well used*

<sup>1</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Laing MSS. (1925), ii. 525. Dundas planned to have Wm. Rose, Lord Fife's agent, collect all the election data he could from Sir James Grant.

by the Duke of Gordon [*italics mine*] and hinted that, in any future arrangements, a seat for you and your son would be one of the stipulations. I give this hint to let you a little into the probable *carte du pays*, and in order that you may not enter into any new engagements as to Banffshire, Morayshire, Aberdeenshire or the Burghs. As to Inverness, which may perhaps come under their plan, I think you formerly mentioned some engagement you were under there. So far as that goes there is no help for it; but even that, it may be prudent not to extend further, till it is seen how matters are likely to go.<sup>1</sup>

In September Dundas brought his plans to fruition, and forced a coalition with Lord Fife and the Grants upon a very reluctant Duke of Gordon. At the end of August Dundas left his Highland lodge at Dunira, and was soon writing to Grenville:

I am thus far on my way to the North of Scotland on a visit to Sir James Grant, General Grant, the Duke of Gordon, Lord Findlater, and Lord Fife. They are all very hostile to each other; and yet I am told that a visit from me may probably have the effect of uniting their political interests in such a manner as to co-operate for securing five seats in Parliament at the General Election in the interest of Government; whereas, if I do not interpose, there is danger of their getting into immediate War-fare. . . . When I tell you that I was living idly and pleasantly with a few chosen friends in my Highland retreat, you will not suppose that this is a jaunt of pleasure, but I must undertake it.<sup>2</sup>

Eighteen days later, on the 20th of September, Dundas sent the Duke of Gordon a long letter which was in the nature of an ultimatum on the whole question of the North.<sup>3</sup> In brief, the Duke was threatened with political excommunication if he rejected the coalition with Lord Fife. Dundas began by pointing out that the Duke had some time before refused to come to an agreement with Lord Fife which would have given Aberdeen and Moray. Under this agreement the Duke was to have returned Sir James Grant for Moray.

<sup>1</sup> Fraser, W., *The Chiefs of Grant*, ii. 496.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. iii. 421.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS. Letter in my possession.

Since this would have definitely attached the Grants and Lord Findlater to the Dundas 'interest', the Duke's refusal was a source of annoyance to Dundas. He accordingly took pains in this letter to remind the Duke that, in spite of this, he had made no separate settlement with Lord Fife on the terms which the latter had offered after the Aberdeen by-election of 1786. These terms Dundas had refused to consider on three grounds: first, that the price (freedom of action for Fife in the county of Banff) was too high; secondly, that Ferguson's consent to run against the Gordon 'interest' could not be secured; and thirdly, that Sir James Grant would not wish to be entirely dependent on Lord Fife. In conclusion, Dundas impressed it upon the Duke that his recent conversations with Ferguson and Sir James Grant had made the acceptance of this offer from Lord Fife even more impossible. The Duke must accept the proposed coalition, or Dundas will wash his hands of the whole business. These are Dundas's concluding paragraphs, written, as he tells us in a post-script, just before William Rose, Lord Fife's agent, arrived for 'orders' which Dundas still refused to give:

Under these circumstances I have met your Grace—I cannot say my opinion has been asked—but I have been called upon to accord to the opinion of others, who think that a General Contest with Lord Fife is preferable to any other arrangement.

I enter into none of the Motives which dictate that opinion but, as it is diametrically opposite to mine, I have wrote this letter on purpose to mark that Difference of Opinion, and that it may never be called in Question either by myself or any other person that such is my opinion. The grounds of my opinion are: that, without committing the Duke of Gordon to any Body, it relieved him from a most expensive political Warfare which no success could justify.—2ndly, It gave him an opportunity handsomely and liberally to concur in obliging through me the families of Findlater and Grant, with whom his family must connect if they continue in opinion of not connecting with Lord Fife. 3rdly, These motives would have prevailed in deciding my opinion in any



State of the Election Laws, but in their present extraordinary and unsettled State, I am induced by this strong additional Motive, a Conviction that the Issue of a Contest could not possibly end better and may very probably end worse even for the Duke's immediate Interest, and certainly much more, looking to the permanent Interest of his Family. Upon this others may differ; but it is my opinion and I must act on my own Judgment.

Having said this much, I have only farther to add, so far as Your Grace is concerned, that you will have a fair Opportunity of proving the Errors of my Opinion by acting against it. For, I have maturely weighed this Subject in my Mind, and I have formed my unalterable Decision.— I will return Lord Fife's proposition to him, barely saying in answer to it, that I can give it no consideration; and I shall neither ask nor receive his Interest to Mr. Ferguson or Sir James Grant as a favour to me; and, on the other Hand, Your Grace's Interest shall not be embarrassed by any Request of mine for Your Grace's support in favour of Sir James Grant.

In short, we shall all stand as we stood before the conversation I had with Your Grace last Spring in the Presence of the Dutchess and Lord Adam Gordon. I must only desire to have it understood both by Your Grace and Mr. Ferguson that, although I shall continue to give the utmost Support to you and him in Aberdeenshire, I must reserve to myself the Liberty of judging at any Period upon the Probability of Mr. Ferguson's success, for, if that is doubtful, my Duty to the Government with whom I act constrains me to enter into any arrangements that can prevent it being carried by a Member of Opposition.

It only remains for me to add that, tho' it is my Misfortune to differ in this Instance from Others much better entitled to advise you than I am, I shall at all times be actuated toward Your Grace and Family with the same sentiments of Regard and personal Affection which have uniformly influenced my Conduct since my Acquaintance with you, and I remain, etc. etc.<sup>1</sup>

This letter accomplished all Dundas wished, for, the very next day, the Duke replied as follows:

I have just now read your letter upon the proposed arrange-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS. Letter in my possession.

ment of the Politicks of the Northern Counties wherein I am so intimately concerned. When I asked of you to take that charge, I did it upon a thorough conviction of your friendship for me, which I have so often experienced, and have never called in question, and I am persuaded the plan now suggested is what you must think most for my interest in the present state of things. Relying entirely on your judgment, I shall most willingly acquiesce in your determination; only I hope you will not think it an unreasonable request to beg of you to secure the support of Lord Findlater and Sir James Grant for me upon a future occasion, as there is nothing I wish more than to oblige you and to live in friendship with Lord Findlater and Sir James.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange of letters marked the end of the negotiations. It only remained for Dundas to carry out the programme agreed upon for the northern counties. In January 1789 Lord Fife persuaded his son, Sir James Duff, who had deserted Pitt on the Regency question,<sup>2</sup> to resign his seat, thus giving an opportunity for Dundas's friend Ferguson to be elected for Banffshire.<sup>3</sup> At the next General Election, in 1790, Ferguson was unanimously elected for Aberdeenshire; Sir James Grant and his son, Lewis Alexander Grant, were unanimously elected for Banffshire and Morayshire; and finally, Alexander Brodie, the 'nabob', was unanimously elected for the Elgin District of Burghs.<sup>4</sup> To these seats Inverness-shire should be added, for, during 1789-90, Dundas negotiated successfully with Sir James Grant and the Fraser family<sup>5</sup> for the election of a candidate, Norman MacLeod, who would support the Dundas 'interest'.<sup>6</sup> In this way, therefore, Dundas had fully carried out his plan, outlined in his letter to Grenville on September 2, 1787, of 'securing five seats in Parliament at the General Election in the interest of Government'.

In this achievement the motives which actuated

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., Sept. 21, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.

<sup>5</sup> Fraser, W., *Chiefs of Grant*, ii. 505-7.

<sup>6</sup> Adam, C. E., *Political State of Scotland, 1788*, p. 173.

Dundas, and the methods which were used, did not differ essentially from those of his earlier years. Looking back upon the negotiations for the control of the North a year after they had been completed, Dundas wrote to Steele, one of the Treasury secretaries, on September 2, 1788: 'I must begin with doing justice to Lord Fife, than whom nobody whatever in this part of the world [Scotland] has done more to facilitate the strengthening of Mr. Pitt's government'.<sup>1</sup> Dundas then goes on to say that because Fife controlled three seats he felt it impossible to repudiate Fife's advances, in spite of the disapproval of the Duchess of Gordon. It took but a word from Dundas in this same month to cause Fife to stop Skene, who had already begun electioneering in Aberdeen. The Chatham correspondence contains Fife's official note to Dundas promising full support for four seats in 1788.<sup>2</sup> In short, Dundas had merely developed the methods which had been so successful with the Duke of Buccleuch in the past. He first made an alliance with the Duke of Gordon. A hard-fought election contest proved that this alliance was inadequate. He then negotiated, independently of the Duke of Gordon, with all the powers that controlled the North. By September 1788, he had put himself in a position which enabled him to dictate his own terms to the Gordons, Grants, and Duffs. In 1790 the five seats were his.

These years before the General Election of 1790 were, of course, filled with other successes and failures in Scottish electioneering. Another of Dundas's notable successes was the alliance with the Earl of Eglinton for the control of Ayrshire, in which Boswell was so intimately concerned. His letters give an interesting picture of the consummation of this alliance about 1789 and its results. The appointment of Colonel Hugh Montgomerie, the Earl's heir, as inspector of military roads in Scotland brought about a by-

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

election in Ayrshire in 1789.<sup>1</sup> On January 10 Boswell writes to the Rev. William Temple:

As to my canvas in my own county, I started in opposition to a junction between Lord Eglintoun and Sir Adam Ferguson who were violent opponents, and whose coalition is as odious there as the great one is to the nation. A few friends and real independent gentlemen early declared for me. Three other noble Lords, the Earls Cassillis, Glencairn, and Dumfries have lately joined and set up a nephew of the Earl of Cassillis. A Mr. John Whitefoord, who as yet stands as I do, will, I understand, make a bargain with this last alliance. . . . Pitt has behaved very ill in his neglect of me. I now think Dundas a sad fellow in his private capacity. He has used honest David cruelly.<sup>2</sup>

Under these circumstances Boswell's hopes were based on the possibility of his being acceptable as a candidate of compromise. At the end of May he was not so sanguine. Writing to the same friend, he says:

*Entre nous*, my chance for representing my own county is very small. There is a great coalition between Lord Eglintoun and Sir Adam Ferguson, formed and supported by Dundas. Against that, there are three candidates, one who has a large number of votes and two of us who have each such a number that he cannot succeed unless we both join him. It is possible that, by remaining firm, there may be such a throw of the dice, or such a junction that I may be Member at least for part of the Parliament. Meantime, knowing my small chance, I spend almost nothing in electioneering, yet keep up a spirited appearance.<sup>3</sup>

In August Boswell gives an even clearer picture of the situation:

My immediate object is our own county election of an interim member, in room of Colonel Montgomerie, who has got a place at £500 a year. Dundas is insolently forcing upon us a gentleman from another county, which I and the other two declarants, as candidates at the general election against

<sup>1</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Tinker, C. B., ed., *Letters of James Boswell*, ii. 355. Boswell contended that Dundas had made the elder Boswell a death-bed promise to aid David Boswell, James's brother.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 370.

his candidates now unite to resist. To-morrow is the election day. I fear we shall lose it. But we shall make an admirable figure. To own the truth, I have very little chance for success at the general election. But I may perhaps negotiate for a part of the Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

They did lose it.<sup>2</sup> Dundas's friend, William MacDowall of Garthland, formerly M.P. for Renfrewshire, was elected, but held the seat for only a few months. At the General Election in 1790, Ayrshire elected Sir Adam Ferguson unanimously<sup>3</sup> in accordance with the Dundas-Eglinton agreement.

In spite of these defeats, Boswell was not entirely quieted. A rumour that Sir Adam Ferguson was about to resign the seat once more roused Boswell's hopes of gratifying his political ambitions. In November 1790 Boswell assured Dundas solemnly upon his honour that Dundas had, in 1784, promised him the Dundas influence in Ayrshire. This promise Boswell had never hitherto claimed because 'it was made after we had participated largely of your generous wines'.<sup>4</sup> At about this time he wrote another long letter to Dundas which gives further light upon the agreement of Dundas with the Earl of Eglinton:

My dear Sir,

I have been much engaged abroad since your answer to my political letter was left at my house; otherwise I should not have suffered a moment to elapse before replying to it. I own the style of it startled me till, upon looking at the copy of my hasty letter from Sir Joshua Reynolds, I perceived that I had strangely omitted to state the modification under which I asked and you promised me your interest in Ayrshire.

Lord Eglintoun, by his coalition with Sir Adam Ferguson, guaranteed by you, having then monopolized the county for seven years [Boswell probably means since 1780] my request was, that, in case of Col. Montgomerie's vacating his seat, I might succeed to it, to which you answered that if I settled it with Lord Eglintoun, I might depend on your support. This,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 375.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.

<sup>4</sup> Tinker, C. B., ed., *Letters of James Boswell*, ii. 524.

which applied to the first seven years, you will observe is not inconsistent with your engagement for fourteen years of which your letter now gives me the first information. I had no notion that you were tied up for a second seven; and therefore my asking and your giving such a promise was certainly not absurd, an unfounded imputation which you ascribe to both of us.

As to your compliment to my lively fancy, it has never yet exerted itself in inventing facts; nor am I one of those who are blessed with an accomodating memory which can recollect or invent facts as it may suit self-interest for the time.

I thank you for your information that Sir Adam Ferguson has not yet taken his seat. But in return I can assure you that he could not do it until next Thursday and therefore I have reason to conclude that he will.

But to bring the matter to something like an explicit conclusion—as my services to the present administration are admitted, and my attachment to it upon independent principles still continues—should Sir Adam Ferguson reveal to you his hitherto profound secret of vacating his seat, will you or will you not give me what interest you may have in Ayrshire, that I may represent it. As I am, my old friend, upon my honour, open and fair with you, and as I do believe you intend to be with me, pray be so kind as to let me have without delay your answer written or verbal as you please, because the letters I have received are such that I must decide one way or the other. I need not add that your compliance will greatly oblige,

My dear Sir,

Your faithful, humble servant,  
James Boswell.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of Dundas's reply to this explicit demand, we can only infer that it must have been a repetition of what Dundas had previously written on the subject. Nothing further came of it because Sir Adam did not resign the seat.<sup>2</sup> Some months later, in February 1791, Dundas gave Boswell's brother David the place in the Navy Office, at £100 a year, which Boswell had solicited for his brother for so many years. It was accepted in a good spirit, for Boswell writes :

<sup>1</sup> From the original in Mel. MSS., N.L.S., also printed in Tinker, *op. cit.*, ii. 525.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return.*

'By the way, Mr. Dundas has strictly kept his word to me and given him [David] the first vacant place in his Navy Office.'<sup>1</sup> These experiences of Boswell with Dundas show the power of the Dundas despotism, the impossibility of breaking its hold over a county, once it had entrenched itself behind an alliance with a powerful noble family. What is perhaps more important, they give another example of the Dundas practice of conciliating the fallen enemy with patronage of one sort or another. When Dundas was at the height of his power there was hardly a family of consequence in Scotland, whether Whig or Tory, that was not under some obligation to him.<sup>2</sup>

There are two other successes and one failure in the late 1780's which throw light on Dundas's electioneering methods. In July 1786 John Hamilton-Nisbet of Pencaitland, the husband of Dundas's niece Janet, was elected for Haddingtonshire in place of Hew Hamilton-Dalrymple, another of Dundas's friends, who had been appointed Auditor of Excise in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Dundas's management of this transaction shows his desire to do nothing arbitrarily, nothing that would lead his friends to think that he had dictated to them. He first informed John Hamilton-Nisbet of the approaching vacancy in the county, and got him to communicate the information, under promise of secrecy, to William Hamilton-Nisbet, John's wealthy elder brother who had married the heiress of Lord Robert Manners. Upon the auditor's appointment being published, William wrote to Dundas that, as there was no further need of secrecy, he was going ahead with the canvass. In the letter he begged Dundas's answer 'to a very plain question, whether or not I may trust to your interest at this juncture. I mentioned to you at Wimbledon that I was ready to produce the cash to bring my

<sup>1</sup> Tinker, *op. cit.*, ii, 423.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cockburn, H., *Memorials of His Own Time*, ch. ii, and *Life of Jeffrey*, i, 77-9. See also Brougham, H., *Statesmen of the Time of George III*, iii, essay on Dundas.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, pp. 91, 171.

brother into Parliament (as this seemed what you wished for him) whenever you pointed out a place, and this I still am strenuous of wishing'.<sup>1</sup> The rough draft of Dundas's reply to this letter shows clearly the political sagacity with which he worked:

It is impossible for me to disapprove of your taking the first moment you think best to consult your friends on the subject of your letter, but, feeling that sentiment in yourself, you cannot disapprove of another acting upon the same principle. From personal regard to yourself and near connection with your family, I am induced individually to wish well to an object you have so much at heart, but, in politicks [Dundas crossed these two words out] when *you desire an immediate answer to a very plain question whether or not you may trust to my interest at this juncture* [the italics are Dundas's] you drive me [these three words crossed out] I can give you no answer but one, that I must consult and know what is agreeable to the wishes of my friends. I *have no title* whatever [italics Dundas's] to command their votes, and have never acted with them upon that principle. I have the honor to be, with great regard,<sup>2</sup>

In the county of Fife the death of Lieut.-General Robert Skene in May 1787 gave Dundas an opportunity to assume control at the by-election in the following July. His efforts to ally himself with the Wemyss 'interest' in this county after his defeat by their candidate in 1775-6 have already been mentioned. This alliance was put into effect at this Fife election in 1787. Colonel William Wemyss was elected on a definite understanding that he was to be a firm supporter of Mr. Pitt's Government. After the event, Dundas strengthened his hold with further patronage to those who had helped Colonel Wemyss.<sup>3</sup> It is not,

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, Wm. Nisbet to D., May 11, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Rough draft in D.'s own hand, enclosed in above.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 133, N.L.S., Maj.-Gen. Skene to D., May 4, 1788. See also Hist. MSS. Comm., Rutland MSS. (1894), iii. 429. D. to Francis Dundas, 'We were much obliged to Gen. Skene for carrying Col. Wemyss' election for the county of Fife, and, upon that score, I hope the Duke of Rutland will expedite the business [of selling out a commission for Skene]', and also P.R.O., H.O. 102.4, D.'s memorandum: 'If the office of Commissary of commissariat at St. Andrews, soon expected to be vacant should be applied for, it ought to be reserved for Col. Wemyss' interest in the present contest for the County of Fife.



therefore, extraordinary that Wemyss was unanimously<sup>1</sup> returned for Fife at the next General Election in 1790. At the previous by-election in 1787, there had been a contest on election day, and Dundas had been much displeased with those who voted for the Whig candidate. The innocent apparently suffered with the guilty, for Thomas Erskine, British consul at Gothenburg, wrote to Dundas from Gothenburg, in August 1788, that he 'was much hurt by the inattention you was pleased to show me in Scotland'. From his long and plaintive letter, it appears that the 'inattention' was a result of Erskine's *brother's* not having supported Colonel Wemyss. Dundas had ignored Erskine's request for an interview during the week when Erskine was in Edinburgh. Finally Erskine called on Dundas's mother and sister, from whom he learned that Dundas had, for this reason, struck off his list three of the Erskines, namely, Thomas Erskine, Thomas Erskine's nephew, and Dr. Thomas Erskine. After assuring Dundas that the offending brother had reasons for acting against Wemyss which would have satisfied Dundas, Erskine added: 'I had no favour to ask.—On the contrary, it was my intention, from inclination, had you come to the subject of elections, to have offered the little interest I have from the estate of Cambo, and another, which I expect that my brother has purchased. As also what interest we have in the Eastern Boroughs [Anstruther Easter district] which perhaps on some occasion may be of service.'<sup>2</sup>

These two successes at by-elections give intimate glimpses of Dundas as a political manager. It must not be presumed, however, that he always won. There were failures. One of these occurred at a by-election in Renfrewshire in 1786. Another failure of these years which is worth noting occurred in 1788 in the Dysart District of Burghs (Dysart, Kirkcaldy, Burntisland, Kinghorn). It is doubly interesting on that account.

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Thos. Erskine to D., Aug. 6, 1788.

Hitherto, we have heard little of Dundas's electioneering in the burghs outside Edinburgh. It is clear that he engaged in burgh electioneering from the beginning of his career.<sup>1</sup> Indeed he refers to it as distinctly distasteful to him,<sup>2</sup> but there is little evidence as to the precise nature of his activities, and none whatever has been found to prove that he used *his own money* at any time during his political career to buy the political favour of burgh councillors. That money, not patronage, was the decisive factor in burgh politics, the following correspondence well shows. In September 1788, when a general election was thought imminent, the Earl of Balcarres wrote to Dundas: 'My brother has accepted your very kind offer of your interest and that of government for the burghs of Kinghorn &c. at the next election. We shall pay our respects to the Towns about a week hence.'<sup>3</sup> Much to Dundas's chagrin, Balcarres's brother, the Hon. Robert Lindsay, withdrew from the contest the following year, having spent more money than he could afford and having incurred law expenses which he wished to have repaid to him by whomever Dundas should select to succeed him as the Dundas candidate. These paragraphs of Lindsay's letter to Dundas of October 3, 1789, give a vivid picture of burgh politics:

I declined answering your last, as it could tend to no purpose but that of giving you unnecessary trouble. The last letter I wrote you was perhaps too much in the style of a person dissatisfied, but I cannot help observing that the reply was more severe than it deserved. My opinion with respect to the Kinghorn election was invariably the same from the moment I first saw the features of the people, and fain would I have stopt there, but Balcarres thought differently. The event proved that I was in the right and I withdrew with a loss of £3,000; had I gone on answering Mr. H's demands, God knows where it would have left me. The Purport of this letter is just to mention the following disbursements from

<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, D. to Robinson, Oct. 8, 1781.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Balcarres to D., Sept. 2, 1788.

which I hope to be exonerated by the person who takes up the cudgels.

1st the sum of £300 to Mr. Taitt paid him in consequence of strong recommendation before I entered the contest.

2nd the expense of lawsuits instituted by Mr. Ross £450.

I cannot help thinking it hard that Mr. Hamilton should run away with the merit of securing the town and government which was done at my sole expense attended with uncommon trouble, and, it may in the end be prejudicial to his interest in the Borough if I am obliged to mention him as the only cause for my withdrawing from the contest.<sup>1</sup>

As matters turned out, this failure was only temporary. Dundas got the Hon. Charles Hope of Waughton, the son of his friend the Earl of Hopetoun,<sup>2</sup> to 'take up the cudgels'. Charles Hope was elected in 1790.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of these by-elections and alliances with powerful families, the Dundas interest had been increased by at least five seats *before* the Parliament elected in 1784 was dissolved.<sup>4</sup> There was no longer any question of Dundas's holding his own in Scotland. He was steadily and surely going ahead. He had not merely won five seats, but he had laid the foundations for winning many others at the next election. His own general satisfaction with his work is reflected in his letter to Pitt on his annual visit to Scotland in the summer of 1788. He then referred to the political outlook in Scotland as 'very favourable'. He expressed sorrow at his inability to favour Sir Thomas Dundas for family reasons, and hoped that 'a cordial understanding between the Argyles and Lord Graham would relieve us of Sir Thomas Dundas in Stirlingshire and Keith Elphinstone in Dumbartonshire'.<sup>5</sup> In October 1789 he was even more sanguine about himself when he wrote to Grenville that 'a number of circumstances concur in my person to make me the veritable cement of the administration'. He then had in mind not merely Scotland but India as well, for he flattered himself that

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 692, Robt. Lindsay to D., Oct. 3, 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, J., *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS. 157.

\* See map in Appendix.

he 'could not at present leave my share in the government of India without some inconvenience to the public service'.<sup>1</sup> The best description of him as the 'cement' of the government in Scotland at this time is not given by himself, but by his enemies the Scottish Whigs, in the *Political State of Scotland in 1788*,<sup>2</sup> which was drawn up for William Adam and Henry Erskine; and it is to that that we must turn before passing on to Dundas's management of the next General Election.

The industrious compiler of this document made a list of the 2,662 votes enrolled in the thirty-three Scottish counties at Michaelmas 1788. As we have seen, this does not mean that there were that number of voters even had they all come to an election meeting.<sup>3</sup> Many names were repeated in two or more counties. For example, Samuel Mitchelson, Writer to the Signet, 'lately made a clerk of Session by Mr. Dundas', apparently made a profession of accepting life-rent votes in the interest of Dundas and Lord Fife. He had votes in Orkney, Caithness, Midlothian, Peebles, Renfrew, Dumfries, and two in Lanark (one controlled 'in right of his wife').<sup>4</sup> The compiler usually followed each name with a sentence or two describing the voter, such as, 'Married a sister of Buchan Hepburn's father. His son Member for Wigton. A good estate of £2,000 or £3,000 a year. Ministerial', or, 'The uncle of Sir Robert Sinclair aforesaid. Made a Clerk of Session by Dundas. Will go with him'. At the end of each county list followed a statistical summary, in which the individual votes were separated from those 'made' or controlled by influential persons. By far the most influential were the Duke of Gordon and the Earl of Fife, who controlled 243 votes, all in Aberdeen, Banff, Inverness, and Moray (Elgin). Votes which the compiler classed as 'individuals' had a substantial majority (i.e. of more than five) in only nine counties: Mid-

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1893), i. 534.

<sup>2</sup> Adam, C. E., ed., *Political State of Scotland, 1788*.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Adam, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

lothian, Fife, Forfar, Haddington, Kincardine, Linlithgow, Peebles, Perth, Selkirk. This, however, does not give 'influence' its due, for Dundas, who controlled at least two of these nine, Midlothian and Haddington, is not separately classed as an influential person. Nevertheless, there is a strong flavour of Dundas about this whole compilation. He is specifically mentioned as giving patronage of some sort to at least one voter in all but five counties, Argyle, Banff, Bute, Kinross, and Wigton. Although the compiler of this list saw fit thus to mention Dundas specifically by name only 116 times, his influence was no doubt far greater, for he controlled the Dukes of Gordon and Buccleuch, the Earls of Fife, Eglinton, Glasgow, Balcarres, and Hoptoun. Exactly how many more of the 220 'influential' people did his bidding at this time, it would be difficult to judge accurately, but the number is large, including such prominent county families as the Dalrymples, the Grants, the Hepburns, the MacDowalls, the Hamiltons of Pencaitland, the Fergusons, and the Homes, to name only a few. Of the 1,373 votes classed as controlled by such families, probably a large majority were in the Dundas 'interest'. An analysis of the 116 cases of patronage which are specifically mentioned shows that the Dundas influence was still strongest in central and southern Scotland. More than ten voters were favoured with appointments to government posts in each of the following counties: Midlothian, Fife, Haddington, Lanark, Perth. Strong as the Dundas 'interest' was at this time, it should not be forgotten that the compiler of this list did not regard Dundas as unconquerable. He wrote in a spirit of optimism to his Whig employers, who hoped to learn how the Tory power in Scotland could be broken. At a time when there seemed to be a reasonable chance that the Prince of Wales's followers would be able to win in England, he told them that the election of Whig candidates in several Scottish counties was possible. He described the Tories as vulnerable in Ayr, Dumbarton, Dumfries,

Kirkcudbright, Renfrew, and Lanark. Nevertheless, everything depended on patronage, and Dundas had that. Various individuals who had sons 'breeding'<sup>1</sup> to the Bar, or India, or the Navy were not going to change their political allegiance until the 'ins' were out and the 'outs' were in. Fortunately for Dundas, the Regency crisis passed without a dissolution of Parliament. When the next General Election finally arrived, Dundas had had ample time to make his Scottish 'cement' impervious to any Whig attacks.

The year preceding this election of July 1790 was filled with political activity. In July 1789 Dundas was meditating an attack upon the county of Caithness by running young Sir Robert Sinclair of Murkle against the old established 'interest' of Sir John Sinclair. Since Sir Robert had married one of the daughters of the Duke of Gordon,<sup>2</sup> his election would most fittingly complete the conquest of the North. Even though nothing came of this plan and Sir John remained M.P. for Caithness after Dundas's own death,<sup>3</sup> the correspondence about this county gives us another interesting side-light on Dundas's tactics. At that time one Sir John Sinclair of Barrock, who considered himself independent of his great namesake Sir John (of Ulbster), was in financial difficulties. Sir John of Ulbster hence lost no time in attempting, through a third person, to buy out Sir John of Barrock both as to property and superiority, but the secret leaked out. An observant friend went at once to Dundas's confidential agent, Mr. Tait, with the news that Sir John of Barrock might be willing to separate the superiority from the property and hence leave the vote at Dundas's disposal if Dundas would promise patronage to his son and a pension, say £100, to his four daughters. On receiving word of this from Mr. Tait, Dundas wrote that he had no objections to what had been proposed in favour of Barrock's family, but that, for good reasons,

<sup>1</sup> Adam, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return*.

it could not be done immediately. Barrock's neighbour and friend then wrote directly to Dundas, urging him 'to keep this matter in view, and to take under your consideration that what Barrock's family may claim is not in return for giving their votes one way or the other in the county, but as a recompense to Barrock for parting with a valuable part of his property to serve Sir Robert Sinclair, and, for declining at the same time to enter into a treaty with the other party for a whole sale of his estate, both property and superiority'.<sup>1</sup> This gives us another example of the way in which votes were thought of as connected with land rather than with men, and of the all-importance of patronage. Whether or not Dundas gave the desired pension is uncertain. Later developments probably justified his policy of caution. A victory for him in a small county controlled by Sir John Sinclair would have been an extraordinary achievement.

In other counties, Dundas was more successful. The consummation of his alliance with the Earl of Eglinton for the control of Ayrshire, which has already been mentioned,<sup>2</sup> took place in February 1790, much to the chagrin of the Earl of Cassilis, who had 'made' fifteen votes for the express purpose of thwarting the ministerial candidate.<sup>3</sup> In March the finishing touches were put to the arrangements for the North with the agreement of the Duke of Gordon and the Fraser family to support Norman MacLeod as ministerial candidate for Inverness-shire.<sup>4</sup> Dundas felt so secure with regard to the North that he had no hesitation in advising Lord Grenville to favour the opposition candidate in Aberdeen with a presentation to a Crown living in Kildrummle parish. He wrote: 'I return you Mr. Skene's letter. You know he is Ferguson's competitor for the county of Aberdeen, and Sir William Forbes is one of his chief supports; but from the way

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., John Anderson to D.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, pp. 197, 215.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 133, N.L.S., H. Montgomerie to D., Feb. 23, 1790.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 746, N.L.S., N. MacLeod to D., Mar. 17, 1790.

he states it, if it is perfectly accurate, there seems no reason for your refusing to gratify him in what he asks.'<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the results of the General Election of 1790 must have been most gratifying to Dundas. When it was over, he was in absolute control of the members for twenty-two counties and ten districts of burghs. In addition to these, he probably controlled at least two more of the forty-five members for Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Actual contests took place on election day in only nine of the thirty counties and in only seven of the districts of burghs.<sup>3</sup> The other twenty-nine members are reported as having been unanimously elected in their respective counties and burghs. As we have seen, Dundas's arrangements for the five seats in the North and for Ayrshire went off without a hitch. In Dumbarton, Captain Geo. Keith Elphinstone (later Admiral, Lord Keith) was replaced by Sir Archibald Edmonstone, a firm supporter of Pitt and Dundas.<sup>4</sup> Sir William Augustus Cuninghame, Dundas's old enemy, was defeated in Linlithgow thirty-four to twenty by the Dundas candidate, the Hon. John Hope, son of the Earl of Hopetoun.<sup>5</sup> The casting vote of the delegate of the presiding burgh of the Dysart District of Burghs brought in the Hon. Charles Hope, another son of the Earl of Hopetoun, defeating John Crauford of Auchenames, a Whig sympathizer and friend of Coutts,<sup>6</sup> the banker.<sup>7</sup> Orkney, which had always hitherto been controlled by Dundas's hostile relatives, the Dundases of Dundas, was won from Colonel Thomas Dundas of Fingask by John Balfour nineteen votes to thirteen.<sup>8</sup> Indian patronage for the Balfour and Honyman families was probably the decisive factor in this victory. Dundas candidates also won out in actual contests on election

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1892), i. 568.

<sup>2</sup> See maps in Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.

<sup>4</sup> Adam, *Political State of Scotland, 1788*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, *Political State of Scotland, 1790*, Bodleian Lib.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Coleridge, E. H., *Coutts, passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Anon, *op. cit.*



day in Dumfries, Perth, Sutherland, Perth District of Burghs, and Wigton District of Burghs. Dundas candidates were defeated in Cromarty, Stirling, and in Haddington District of Burghs. Of these, the defeat in Stirlingshire was the most serious, for Dundas had hoped to get rid of Sir Thomas Dundas,<sup>1</sup> the head of the family of Dundas of Dundas. He probably would have done so, if all entitled to vote had attended the election meeting, whereat the votes stood: Sir Thomas Dundas 28, Sir Alexander Campbell 22, absent 9.<sup>2</sup> The defeat in Cromarty is of such unusual interest that it will be considered in detail before we pass on to discuss Dundas's management of the election of the sixteen Scottish peers in 1790.

Cromarty, politically the smallest county in Scotland save Bute, had eighteen voters enrolled in 1788, but only *six* of these attended the election meeting in 1790. To the Whig report on the county in 1788 is appended the following significant entry:

Ready to be inrolled in November or December next (1789)  
Mr. Alexander Brodie.

The brother of Brodie of Brodie. Made a fortune in India.

Supposed will be the ministerial candidate.<sup>3</sup>

This is the same Brodie, the 'nabob', who had a large interest in Morayshire and who was to get control of the Elgin District of Burghs under the arrangements which Dundas was making with Lord Fife and the Duke of Gordon for the control of the North.<sup>4</sup> Brodie had, therefore, two strings to his bow. If elected in Cromarty, he could turn over the Elgin burghs to some friend or relative. If defeated he could serve for Elgin burghs. On or about July 15, 1789, Brodie got several friends to purchase 'superiorities' in Cromarty which would entitle them to vote a year later. On June 15, 1790, *Dundas* wrote to Donald MacLeod, the sheriff of

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., Chatham MSS. 157, D. to Pitt, Aug. 11, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> *Supra*, p. 206 ff.

Cromarty, to be sure and set the election for a date in July *after* Brodie's new votes should have legally 'matured'. The sheriff replied reassuringly on the eighteenth:

I had a letter to-day from Mr. Davidson [Brodie's opponent]. I shall always wish to pay every attention to any wish coming from you, but on the present occasion you owe me no favour for granting it, as I had on mature deliberation predetermined that I should not bring on the election for the county of Cromarty till after the 15th of July. In the situation of that county where a few days may give a legal title to several gentlemen who claim to be enrolled, it would be an unjustifiable switch of power I hope I never can be brought to exercise to deprive them of their franchise by hurrying on the election.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately for Dundas's plans, the supporters of Davidson persuaded the sheriff that the interests of those already entitled to vote came first. Five days later, the sheriff wrote that he had forgotten the interests of those already on the roll who would be deprived of voting on July *fifteenth*<sup>2</sup> because 'most necessary avocations call them to distant parts of the country and they have made these arrangements on my implied good-will towards Mr. Davidson which I had at times expressed to himself'. These paragraphs show the very difficult position in which the old Scottish election laws put the sheriff. Mr. MacLeod was apparently trying his best to do his duty according to his convictions, for he says:

What then [i.e. on June 18th] flowed from my pen were the dictates of my heart founded on the purest motives, but I must say now, without that due consideration which the subject merited. . . . It was not for reasons of partiality to Mr. Brodie, nor from a blind complaisance to your request, but from my wish to act impartially and *justly* if I could. I never gave Mr. Brodie room to expect that I would act with partiality towards him in the present question. Tho' I respect and esteem him and I am persuaded he will have the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., D. MacLeod to D., June 18, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

candour to say so, I have now determined to fix the election for the eighth of July.

I shall very much regret it if you consider the reasons which have actuated my present conduct insufficient.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it was a close contest and Brodie was defeated four to three by the casting vote of the chairman of the election meeting, William Pulteney.<sup>2</sup>

The elections of the sixteen peers to represent the Scottish peers in the House of Lords were, as we have already observed, not so important to the government in power as the elections for the House of Commons. Until 1790, Dundas does not seem to have busied himself with them very much, although he probably did his best to bring in the group of peers on the list which the Government always sent to Scotland before every election. The election of July 23, 1790, was perhaps the most spirited and acrimonious which had occurred at Holyrood Palace since the Union of the two kingdoms, and Dundas was in the thick of the fight. On this occasion probably more votes were protested and more ties resulted than had ever before been the case.<sup>3</sup> The election<sup>4</sup> well justified a remark of the Earl of Balcarres that peers' elections 'are at all times most vile things, and I would never advise any peer to think of making a promise, because, if two promises are given, it may eventually happen that they run counter to each other'.<sup>5</sup>

Electioneering among the Scottish peers began in earnest in April 1790, when the supporters of the Pitt administration held a meeting in London to decide upon a plan of campaign against an association of Scottish peers who styled themselves 'independent'. The Government then agreed upon a tentative list of thirteen to set off the list which the 'independents' had drawn up. Circular letters to the whole Scottish peerage were not to be used, but individual peers known to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, MacLeod to D., June 23, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Beatson, R., *Chronological Register of Parliament*, iii. 140-1.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the election procedure see p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 461, E. of B. to Ld. Napier, Jan. 19, 1789.

be well disposed to Pitt were to be asked not to promise single votes to any one and to inform the Government definitely how many of the Government nominees they would support.<sup>1</sup> Lord Cathcart, Dundas's former pupil in the law, wrote to the young Lord Napier that the Government had selected Napier as one of its candidates:

You know what the peers who chuse to call themselves the independent peers are about. . . . In looking over the peerage, you will find a great majority who will support friends to this administration in preference to other candidates, and out of twenty-nine or thirty candidates, it will be no difficult matter to pick out sixteen such as any lord would wish, but few of the majority of friends aforesaid might without concert happen to make exactly the same choices, and here it is that the independent association wait for us. They will combine to carry a mass of fifteen or sixteen plump votes from each man for a fixed list, and then they will pick off as many as they can by single votes from the other side, and by taking away the votes of their strongest men and engaging them if possible with our side in order to run off as many as they can of the weakest; if we do not concert and keep together, they will in this way do a great deal.<sup>2</sup>

By adopting tactics similar to those of the 'independents', the Government hoped to win at least three quarters of the sixteen.

In late June and early July 1790 Dundas and Grenville were in continuous correspondence about the Scottish peers. Grenville found great difficulty in believing the encouraging reports which Dundas sent back from Scotland as soon as he arrived to take charge of the campaign. Grenville wrote on June 30:

I cannot help thinking your statements very sanguine, particularly as to Lord Stormont whose being rejected seems to depend on assuming that none of the other opposition lords supposed to hold out till the last will give him a vote without requiring his vote in return which I can hardly think probable, if they see that the election depends upon it.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Ld. Cathcart to Ld. Napier, Apr. 24, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Lord Marchmont I understand to be quite desperate; Lord Bute there seem to be some hopes of; Lord Bellenden is supposed to have given his proxy to the opposition.

Lord Castlestewart will give us his proxy as Lord Ochiltree. Can you get Sir John Sinclair [who claimed a vote as Earl of Caithness] to give us his in the same manner? Are there any other claimants? I will speak to Pitt about the Duke of Hamilton.<sup>1</sup>

Grenville was most worried by Dundas's report of the possible defection of the Earl of Galloway. At first he flatly refused to believe it and wrote to Dundas: 'I take it for granted, by seeing Lord Galloway's name in your lists, that he has not joined the *soi-disant* independents, which would indeed have been a strange step for him to take'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Lord Galloway did join the independents, as the following letter from Lord Somerville to J. B. Burges written on July 14 clearly shows. Lord Somerville here gives by far the clearest picture of the struggle:

I dined yesterday at Edinburgh, where we mustered ten: Mr. Dundas, Lord Cathcart, etc. etc. Lord Galloway is in town and goes with the Independents as they stile themselves. Mr. Dundas had an interview with him in the next room, but could make nothing of him, as he has engaged many of his votes to the others, but has no chance for himself. The Duke of Leeds does me great honour in giving me his proxy. I had a letter yesterday from Lord Castlestewart who says he has sent me his by the Duke of Buccleugh who is expected to-day. . . .

The other side had a meeting on Monday but nothing passed of any consequence; however they are bound not to exchange a vote with any of us; and we hear the Duke of Buccleugh engaged three or four of his to them some time ago, but I hope he will not think himself bound. Lord Tweeddale is neither with him nor us, and we are short of our number. Lord Crawford was mentioned as a proper person to be sent to yesterday. In my own opinion as things stand at present, not above three or four of our side will come

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1892), i. 590.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 592.

in, Balcarres, Elphinstone, and Elgin the most likely. I wish I may be mistaken. Haddington and Aboyne, who are not candidates, go altogether with them.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas accordingly sent the Earl of Balcarres to interview the Earl of Crawford. When he called, Lord Balcarres found Lord Crawford at home preparing to dine with three of the Opposition peers, Lords Breadalbane, Kinnaird, and Saltoun. Worse than that, he met the servant of the Earl of Selkirk, the Opposition leader, leaving Lord Crawford's house. Nevertheless, he sat down to talk to the Earl. Having broken the ice by getting Lord Crawford to promise a vote for himself, Lord Balcarres then drew out the Government list which Dundas had given him, and began the task of persuading Lord Crawford to vote for it in full. After a short talk, Lord Crawford agreed to vote for seven of this list, whereupon Lord Balcarres told him that 'the seven were very much obliged to him, but that Government could not consider that as a favour done to them'.<sup>2</sup> At this Lord Crawford hesitated and asked for a few days to think the matter over, but Lord Balcarres then told him that 'next week, Government might have the game in their hand independently of the Earl of Crawford'. Lord Crawford, after many hours of argument, finally consented to vote for five more of the Government list, thus making twelve in all. Lord Balcarres was forced to be content with that, and told Dundas, 'I have the fullest confidence he [Lord Crawford] does not vote for those peers who are obnoxious to the twelve by standing upon both grounds, and that his other four votes will be given to Opposition lords'.<sup>3</sup> In order to get Lord Crawford's consent to the twelve, Lord Balcarres was obliged to promise him Dundas's full support towards getting Lord Crawford the military rank of lieutenant-colonel.

The election itself, presided over by George Home

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.4, S. to J. B. Burges, July 14. This letter is in the vol. for 1789, but it is certainly 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 751, Edwards, Balcarres to D., July 15, 1790.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

and Robert Sinclair, Principal Clerks of Session and both friends of Dundas, was a most spirited affair. The votes of several of the thirty-two peers present were questioned, as were also some of the proxies and signed lists. The Clerks showed their partiality by refusing the list of Lord Lyle, one of the Opposition, and accepting that of Lord Castle-Stewart, who claimed the title of Lord Ochiltree. Protests were filed against the titles of Caithness, Belhaven, Newark, Napier, and Ochiltree, whose votes were all allowed to be counted. When the votes were in, it was found that thirteen peers had been elected, six peers being tied for the other three places. Nine of the thirteen elected were Government nominees. Of the six who were tied, three, Lords Stair, Somerville, and Napier, were being actively supported by Dundas. Of the other three, Lords Galloway, Selkirk, and Hopetoun, one, Lord Hope-toun, was a personal friend of Dundas, but, in this case, felt himself bound to several Opposition lords in return for votes.<sup>1</sup> Taken all in all, therefore, Dundas's showing was far better than the 'three or four' which Lord Somerville had prophesied. He had secured nine, and the end was not yet, for the tie had to be broken and the protested titles reviewed before the House of Lords.

Looking back upon the election, Dundas felt that one piece of carelessness had caused the tie and prevented the election of at least three more of the Government list. This piece of carelessness was his delay in sending for the Duke of Gordon's signed list. It was not until two days before the election that Dundas discovered that there was a legal flaw in the proxy which the Duke of Gordon had sent to the Duke of Buccleuch. Although Dundas sent post-haste to Gordon Castle, his letter arrived there only twenty-eight hours before the election, and the Duke was forced to reply that, as it took just under thirty-seven hours to

<sup>1</sup> Anon., *Political State of Scotland*, 1790, gives a full account of what took place on election day at Holyrood.

get a letter back to Edinburgh by the fastest horses, nothing could be done.<sup>1</sup> Dundas felt this disappointment keenly and wrote to Grenville:

It was really hard that among all our chances, we did not get one more vote, as it would have saved a great deal of trouble, and would have seated with certainty three more of our friends. As it now stands, it is really very puzzling, and unless Lord Ochiltree's vote can be sustained, I suspect both Lords Selkirk and Hopetoun will be seated at the expense of two who stood in our interest.<sup>2</sup>

Dundas finally decided that, if Ochiltree's votes were thrown out, thus electing Lords Selkirk and Hopetoun, Government must adopt Lord Galloway as its nominee for the sixteenth place. If, on the other hand, the House of Lords ordered a new election for three, Lords Galloway, Stair, and Somerville were to be supported by the Government. As it happened, the House ordered no elections, but conducted judicial inquiries, finally seating Lords Selkirk and Stair on June 7, 1793. On August 7, 1793, Lord Somerville was elected at a special election to complete the sixteen.<sup>3</sup> Dundas therefore finally was awarded two of the three places which the tie had left vacant in 1790.

Whatever regrets the outcome of the peers' election may have caused him in July 1790, they were soon forgotten amid the satisfaction and joy which the final results of the contests in the counties and burghs brought with them. The keen delight which he took in these victories is revealed in the note which he sent off to Grenville on August 6, 1790:

... I am this day going to a great county meeting and ball of the ladies in Perthshire. The Duke of Atholl, Lord Breadalbane, Lord Kinnoul, in short, all the contending interests in the country will be there. I am curious to see how we shall mix after the violent contest we lately had for the county and burghs. As we beat them in both in a high style, it is easy for

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., July 23, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1892), i. 597, 602.

<sup>3</sup> Beatson, R., *Chronological Register of Parliament*, iii. 140-1.



us to behave well, but I know not whether our vanquished friends will be able to carry it off with good humour.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed he had never stood on firmer ground. The conquest of the North had definitely established the Dundas 'interest' as the strongest in Scotland. It was no longer vulnerable as it had been in 1788. On the foundation laid six years before, Dundas had built a superstructure for his political edifice, strong and enduring, which needed only careful supervision from its architect to bring it still further towards perfection.

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1892), i. 604.

#### IV

### THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE DUNDAS 'INTEREST' 1790-6

THE close of the General Election of 1790 marked the end of Dundas's most active years as political manager of Scotland. He was compelled, during the last ten years of Pitt's administration, to give far less time to Scottish affairs, not because of any lack of interest or any feeling that the power which he had already so firmly established could be maintained and increased without reasonable care and vigilance, but because of the pressure of his work at the War, Home, and India Offices. The management of Scottish politics was therefore put in the hands of Dundas's nephew, Robert Dundas of Arniston, then Lord Advocate. This arrangement did not have the ill effects which probably would have resulted from it in ordinary times, because the French Revolution vastly simplified Dundas's Scottish problems by crushing out almost all opposition to his increasingly despotic control. With a very few notable exceptions, such as the Duke of Hamilton, the handful of Scotchmen who held political power rallied to the support of the 'established order of things'. Moreover, Dundas himself was able to find time to supervise all Scottish matters of vital importance. His nephew never took upon himself the full responsibility for making an important decision until he had consulted his uncle in London, and Dundas continued to make occasional summer trips to Scotland for electioneering purposes. Indeed some of these negotiations which he conducted for the further perfection of his control reveal his political methods more clearly than any which have preceded them. Performed in the midst of his overwhelming tasks as director of the war abroad and exterminator of Jacobinism at home, they show that extraordinary capacity for work which made Dundas the wonder of his official colleagues.

The three years which followed his entrance into the Cabinet were very quiet as far as Scottish electioneering is concerned. Only four matters of major importance claimed his attention. He had to quell slight murmurs of disaffection in two quarters, Midlothian and the North, and he continued his attempts to gain control of Stirling and Caithness. In the early 1790's Robert Dundas was continually uneasy about his hold over Midlothian, to which he had succeeded on his uncle's decision to have himself elected by the Town of Edinburgh instead of by the county of Midlothian. Dundas probably did not share these fears, but he seems not to have turned a deaf ear to his nephew's requests for favours for various *novi homines* who had purchased freeholds in Midlothian.<sup>1</sup> Robert Dundas's nervousness was acute in 1792 when he wrote to his solicitor: 'I was informed some days ago that three Claims for Inrollment in this County [Midlothian] came forward at Michaelmas from the Ramsays, my good friends, and that Ferguson of Raith and his son claim at the same time. I mention it to no man, but don't you think that this looks like the first symptom of hostility?'<sup>2</sup> His uncle appeased him with appointments,<sup>3</sup> and even thought it necessary to buttress his own hold upon the Town of Edinburgh with a little further patronage at the request of the Lord Provost.<sup>4</sup>

The arrangements for the North, on which Dundas had spent so much time and trouble, were seriously disturbed in only one particular. About a year after Dundas and the Duke of Gordon had agreed upon Norman MacLeod's election for Inverness, that gentlemen became mildly, but nevertheless unmistakably, infected with Jacobinism.<sup>5</sup> He had, accordingly, to be disciplined by the cutting off of all patronage. The

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Dec. 31, 1790; also lot 748, R. D. to D., June 18, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii, 294, R. D. to Mr. Davidson, Aug. 14, 1792.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Dec. 21, 1793.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 133, N.L.S., Lord Provost Elder to D., Feb. 18, 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Meikle, H. W., *Scotland and the French Revolution*, p. 196.

following exchange of notes well shows the vigour with which Dundas acted towards those who refused to support the Pitt Government unreservedly. MacLeod wrote to Dundas on August 12, 1791:

Though from the footing on which we last parted, I firmly determined never to ask any favor from you, I find myself obliged to make what may be called an official application. It has been usual to listen to the recommendations of members for counties when small situations in the Customs fall vacant.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas bluntly replied on August 22:

I am not aware of the existence of the official right which you claim respecting Customs offices at Inverness; but, if it does exist, it is erroneously addressed to my office. You best know the footing you are on with Mr. Pitt, to whom the disposal of the office belongs.

I am, Sir,

Henry Dundas.<sup>2</sup>

Trouble of a less serious character resulted from the restiveness of Lord Fife. On hearing rumours of disaffection in that quarter, Dundas asked Pitt to inform Fife, who had been raised to the Lords after the 1790 election, that they both expected him to continue no less steadily to support the Dundas 'interest' in Scotland. This letter appears to have had some effect, for Lord Fife's factor wrote in 1791 that Fife, Dundas, and Ferguson were cordially in agreement once more about the politics of Aberdeen.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, rumours that Sir James Grant was about to vacate his seat in Banff caused Lord Fife to write to Dundas that he wished the seat for his son, Sir James Duff, whom he had now forgiven for his support of the Prince of Wales in 1788.<sup>4</sup> Dundas apparently refused to countenance any such plan, for when a by-election did occur in Banff in 1795, David McDowall Grant was elected.<sup>5</sup> There is no indication that Lord Fife ceased to support

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Rose Papers*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 245, Fife to D., May 9, 1793.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 225.

Pitt during these years, but he had no hesitation about expressing his disapproval of Dundas in private. When Dundas proposed that the Scottish counties hold meetings to assess a special tax for the war in 1794, Lord Fife wrote to his factor:

I suppose Mr. Dundas's conduct will make it impossible for me to take any concern. I wonder the country does not see how much in their interest it is to support independency; you know what trouble and expense it cost me to support this principle. *Mr. Dundas wants to put down every independent man and to annihilate that character as much as possible, but all this is only to yourself.*<sup>1</sup> [Italics the author's.]

In Stirlingshire Dundas lost no time after the election in 1790 in getting his candidate to petition against the election of Sir Thomas Dundas. The petition, though declared neither 'frivolous' nor 'vexatious',<sup>2</sup> was unsuccessful, but the legal absurdities to which such cases gave rise were very well illustrated by the proceedings with regard to it. The validity of the votes against which protest was taken at a Scottish election was decided by the Court of Session at Edinburgh before the House of Commons finally determined which candidate had been really elected. In this case the proceedings of the Court of Session were reported to Dundas by his friend James Bruce of Kinnaird, the Scotchman who, in the 1770's, was one of the first Europeans to reach Abyssinia and to explore the Blue Nile to its source. Bruce's letter shows considerable irritation at the failure of the Lords of Session to serve political expediency by invalidating enough votes to unseat Sir Thomas Dundas:

Our aristocratical friends [the Lords of Session] were that day reduced to their primitive unimportance, and we ended upon an equality which, I suppose, loses the election. Alva [James Erskine, Lord Alva] with his usual pusillanity did not vote, as he says, out of delicacy, being a freeholder in Stirlingshire, by which we have certainly gained the trouble it has cost us to put him on the Roll. Eskgrove [David Rae,

<sup>1</sup> Tayler, A. and H., *Lord Fife to his Factor*, p. 252, Fife to Rose, Mar. 29, 1793.

<sup>2</sup> Oldfield, T. H. B., *Representative History*, vi. 160.

Lord Eskgrove] was absent and Dreghorn [John Maclaurin, Lord Dreghorn] decided the cause against us by finding Col. Ferrier's a fictitious vote though it differed in nothing from Cheap's which he had before sustained unless in that he, Col. Ferrier, was brother to Sir Archibald Edmonstone's agent, which, he said, (a strange reason) sure implied confidence which made it fictitious.

The Bench and the Bar were at daggers drawn the whole debate. The President [Ilay Campbell] behaved with admirable patience, and Henry Erskine had not a grain of decency in his whole conduct.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas was, in fact, never able to control Stirlingshire except possibly for a brief period after Sir Thomas Dundas was made a peer in August 1794.<sup>2</sup> At the next General Election, Keith Elphinstone and his family succeeded to the power formerly held by Sir Thomas Dundas.

In Caithness Dundas conducted secret negotiations with Sir John Sinclair for the control of the Tain District of Burghs (Tain, Dingwall, Dornoch, Wick, Kirkwall). Sir John sent the following written pledge to Dundas in March 1791:

Understanding that you are desirous of securing an interest in the Northern District of Boroughs in Scotland at the ensuing General Election, I hereby pledge myself and my family to procure you the voices of the borough of Wick at that election and at any incidental election which may take place in the course of that Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently the ambitions of the Scott family, of Harden, proved an obstacle to this arrangement, for in November Sir John Sinclair suggested a rearrangement of all the seats in the North which would leave the seat for Elgin burghs completely at Dundas's disposal in order to compensate this family. Under this plan, Alexander Brodie, the 'Nabob', was to have the seat for Banffshire in place of Sir James Grant, who, according to Sir John Sinclair, was 'tired of Parliament'.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 748, N.L.S., James Bruce to D., Feb. 12, 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, pp. 115, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Sir J. Sinclair to D., Oct. 22, 1791.

Sir John outlined this plan to Dundas with a great deal of assurance:

If this could take place, or, if any seat in England could be held out to them [the Scotts], there could be nothing to hinder our agreement being immediately concluded, which, at any rate should be kept as private as possible for many reasons. I really think it had better be finished before you go [i.e. leave Edinburgh] that we may put an end to any talk on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas naturally had no intention of disturbing his former hard-won agreements with the Duke of Gordon and Earl of Fife for the control of Aberdeen, Banff, Moray (Elgin), and the Elgin burghs. The arrangements for those seats remained the same at the next General Election in 1796, but he did succeed, as a result of these dealings with Sir John Sinclair, in getting William Dundas, another nephew, returned for Tain burghs in 1796.<sup>2</sup>

Dundas may have congratulated himself at the success of these negotiations. He had but followed his usual practice of negotiating with the enemy after satisfying himself that he could not win in open combat. If the county of Caithness was not to be had, he would have to content himself with the control of the burghs which were situated in its district. This, obviously, did not please those whom he had previously used in his attempt to wrest the county from Sir John Sinclair. Late in 1793 Dundas's refusal to promote the son of a certain Sir Robert Anstruther from a lieutenancy to a captaincy in the Navy caused the young man's irate father to write a letter which gives a most thorough and intimate revelation of Dundas's political methods at this time. It concerns not only Caithness, but Fife and the Anstruther Easter District of Burghs as well. Sir Robert Anstruther wrote this letter to Robert Dundas as soon as the latter had informed him that Dundas had refused the desired captaincy. Robert Dundas had asked him to come to Edinburgh and talk matters

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return.*

over, but Sir Robert Anstruther gave an acute attack of rheumatism as his excuse for not coming, and continued:

In yours of the thirteenth current [i.e. Dec. 13, 1793] you plainly enough intimate that I need not look for Mr. D[undas]'s support toward my son's promotion in the Navy till at least I account to him or you for the part I took in Caithness last year in canvassing that county for my eldest son without any previous communication with him on the subject. My sailor then must remain as he is or go upon another tack for preferment.

As it would seem Mr. D[undas] looks upon me as tied in a manner I am perfectly unconscious of, and of course must look on me as ungrateful, which is an imputation I cannot bear, I therefore enclose a state of all that ever passed between him and me, from which it evidently appears: That I have all along been steadily and disinterestedly attached to the present ministry; That, had both the favors I ever wished of them been granted, the value of both would hardly amount to what any political agent in a venal Burgh would reckon a reasonable gratification for only as much personal trouble and expense, as I have been, and still am, likely to be put to in the Burghs [i.e. Anstruther Easter district]; That consequently I am under no tie whatever to ask Mr. D[undas]'s leave to canvass any county or burghs for my son that I see a chance of his succeeding in; and That, however easy it were for me to account for every step I ever took in Caithness or elsewhere I should, instead of friendship, merit Mr. D[undas]'s contempt for the meanness of submitting to a Vindication where I owe none.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Robert Anstruther's Statement of his Relations with Mr. Dundas:

Immediately upon the present ministers being called to the direction of affairs, I, who had not for several years attended any county meetings but for elections, was among the first who joined Lord Balcarres in proposing an Address to the Throne on the auspicious change, and since that time no one has been more ready in promoting every address, subscription, and other county measure which was supposed acceptable to the ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Sir Robt. Anstruther to Robt. Dundas, Dec. 29, 1793.



1784. At this date, a gentleman from Mr. Dundas proposed to me that I should offer myself as a candidate for the burghs of Pittenweem etc. [i.e. Anstruther Easter district] in opposition to Sir John Anstruther, which I declined, but on Col. Moncrieff standing forth I readily agreed to give him every support and assistance in my power, and, during the whole of that long and keen contest, I was hardly one day without being in one of the five burghs. Mr. Wm. Lumsdaine, the same gentleman who first spoke to me from Mr. Dundas, assured me he was empowered to say that I might promise to voters as I saw occasion every office in the Revenue Line that should become vacant; in consequence of which assurance, I did promise a certain man the first tide-waiter's place that should fall within the District, and, on my telling the present Lord Advocate that I had done so, he assured me it should be fulfilled. No vacancy happened until Spring 1788, when, on my claiming the promise for my man, the answer I got was that 'by a new arrangement Sir John Anstruther had the sole patronage of these burghs and my man could not possibly have it'. The man had implemented his part of the agreement and my word was pledged to him, so I had no alternative but paying him out of my own pocket the value of the office he should have had, which I accordingly began to do at Whitsun 1788 and shall continue to do.

1788. Having of this date made a purchase in the county of Caithness that gives a vote, and learning accidentally that Mr. Dundas wished very much to get a candidate to turn out [Sir John Sinclair of] Ulbster, I let him know that my son being then of age should be made Caithness Laird and under his protection stand for the county. To the best of my recollection, my conversation on the subject was with the present Lord Advocate [Robert Dundas]. On going through the Roll it appeared not practicable because Sir John of Murkle had rashly engaged himself to Ulbster. Sir John of Murkle died and his son Sir Robert was under no tie, but I was told it would not do unless Sir Robert were the candidate. Tho' sensible of the slight put upon my son, I acquiesced, and it is well known how unwillingly I tied off at Lord Advocate's desire from going North to the election, very near three hundred miles.

When Mr. H[enry] Erskine stood for the county of Fife, and, as matters then were, I sincerely do believe could have

carried it, I, at Mr. Dundas's particular request engaged my own, and what votes I could bring, for Mr. Wemyss with whom I had hardly any acquaintance against the other with whom I had lived twenty years in the most convivial intimacy.

1790. My son Philip having passed for Lieut. in the Navy early in this year, I applied to Mr. Dundas to get him appointed to a ship, which he, in the most obliging manner promised, saying he should take care of the young man's promotion as if he were his own son. In a few months a large appointment of Lieuts. took place and he was one of the number.

8. Nov. 1793. On this date, I wrote Mr. Dundas asking to get the same young man made Master and Commander.

The above is the substance of all that has passed between Mr. Dundas and me.

Robert Anstruther.<sup>1</sup>

This account is undoubtedly somewhat exaggerated. Dundas might well have replied that, on the whole, it was Sir Robert Anstruther who had sought him, and not he that had sought Sir Robert. This is especially true as regards the Caithness episode. In reporting on that whole question, Robert Dundas wrote to his uncle:

Any conversation as to the County of Caithness passed in your presence, and I recollect your being pushed pretty closely by Sir Robert to give him some assurances of supporting his son one day or other, which you declined doing.—The conversation passed, I believe, on Sir Robt. Sinclair's standing for the county and in Lady Arniston's house in George Square.<sup>2</sup>

Dundas could properly insist that his prompt appointment of Sir Robert Anstruther's son to a ship was all that could be expected of him. According to the political code of the time, Sir Robert's canvassing Caithness for his son without the Government's approval relieved the Government of any obligation to do him favours. Moreover, Dundas was too canny a Scot to give full support to any one who had been in

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Sir Robt. Anstruther to Robt. Dundas, Dec. 29, 1793.

<sup>2</sup> R. D. to D., Jan. 17, 1794.

'twenty years of the most convivial intimacy' with the leader of the Scottish Whigs until that person had shown more evidence of a change of heart than had Sir Robert Anstruther. Nevertheless, Dundas cannot entirely be acquitted of the charge of 'using' people and then abandoning them when the subsequent moves in his political game rendered their help unnecessary. These dealings also show that his doing of business through obscure agents such as Lumsdaine and Tait<sup>1</sup> made the non-fulfilment of promises extremely easy.

Of Dundas's other electioneering activities during the years preceding the campaign of 1795-6, but brief notice need be taken. Late in 1790 his 'interest' was greatly strengthened when the Duke of Queensberry, familiarly known as 'Old Q', turned over the management of his political affairs to his heir, the Duke of Buccleuch. The support thus gained in Dumfries-shire and Dumfries District of Burghs, which 'Old Q' had always controlled, was especially welcome to Dundas, whose hold over the southernmost part of Scotland had never been strong.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of his labours as the exterminator of Jacobinism in 1792, Dundas also found time to do some electioneering in the burghs of Cupar and St. Andrews in the Perth district.<sup>3</sup> St. Andrews presented unusual opportunities for a successful intrigue since Lord Breadalbane's brother, the candidate for the district, had just died. Immediately after his death, the councillors declared themselves 'free men', and, as one observer expressed it, let the world know that 'his late lordship might as well have thrown his money into the sea'.<sup>4</sup> This raised the hopes of Colonel Murray, Dundas's candidate, but for a year or two the councillors were completely out of hand. Nevertheless, Lord Cornwallis's victory over Tippoo Sultan ultimately made possible the election of

<sup>1</sup> *V. supra*, p. 222, 245.

<sup>2</sup> Mcl. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Dec. 31, 1790.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, letter in my possession, D. of Athole to D., Aug. 11, 1793.

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 102.5, Hill to Nepean, July 7, 1792.

another Dundas follower, David Scott of Dunninald, Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company. In the county of Orkney, Dundas paved the way during these years for the election of his friend Robert Honyman by giving further patronage.<sup>1</sup> He had first won a foothold there with the election of John Balfour in 1790. Four years later his control was absolutely secured for over ten years. The family of Sir Thomas Dundas did not regain its power in the far North until 1807 or later.<sup>2</sup>

By far the most interesting negotiations in which Dundas engaged in preparation for the next General Election concerned Haddingtonshire and the Haddington District of Burghs (Haddington, Jedburgh, Dunbar, North Berwick, Lauder). In these two constituencies Dundas was confronted, at the beginning of 1795, with an attempt by the Marquess of Tweeddale to strike at the very heart of his power in Scotland. No county save Midlothian was more intimately connected with Dundas and the Dundases of Arniston than Haddingtonshire, or East Lothian, as it was more often called. As the story of these negotiations is somewhat involved, it is well to identify clearly at the outset the seven persons, in addition to Dundas and his nephew Robert, who took part in the arrangements for the county and burghs. These were: the Marquess of Tweeddale, a strong Whig sympathizer at the time of the Regency Crisis who was much influenced by his wife, a sister of the Earl of Lauderdale;<sup>3</sup> the Earl of Lauderdale, one of the most Whiggish of Scotland's noblemen;<sup>4</sup> John Hamilton-Nisbet of Pencaitland, husband of Dundas's niece and Member of Parliament for Haddingtonshire; Sir Hew Dalrymple, Sr.; Hew Dalrymple, Jr., Dundas's candidate for the county; Robert Baird, also a political friend of Dundas's, but in this contest Lord Tweed-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 748, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Dec. 12, 1791; lot 731, the same to the same, Jan. 17, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>3</sup> Adam, C. E., ed., *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* See also Craik, *Century of Scottish History*, ii, 143.

dale's candidate for the county; and finally, George Buchan-Hepburn, a former schoolmate of Dundas's and an owner of much property in the county. The trouble began in March 1795, as soon as it was known that John Hamilton-Nisbet of Pencaitland was about to resign his seat in order to accept the receiver-generalship of the land tax in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Lord Tweeddale stole a march on Dundas by writing at once to Robert Baird and offering to run him for the county at the by-election.<sup>2</sup> When Baird protested that he could not do anything contrary to the Dundas 'interest', Lord Tweeddale assured him that he would write to Dundas and make it all right. Baird accordingly yielded and gave Lord Tweeddale a pledge that he would canvass the county with Lord Tweeddale's support. This threw the whole county into confusion and confronted Dundas with one of the most difficult tasks of his career.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of April the voters of Haddingtonshire did not know which way to turn. Hew Dalrymple wrote that they were so mystified at Baird's candidacy that he had actually to show them the written promise of support which Dundas had given the Dalrymple family.<sup>4</sup> The publication of the news that Dundas was behind Dalrymple and not Baird clarified matters considerably. The county voters knew where they stood. A visit from Hew Dalrymple bearing Dundas's letter of endorsement caused one needy voter with nine children and a destitute brother to sit down at once and write post-haste to Dundas in London:

He [Dalrymple] or whomever you patronize will of course have my vote and interest, as I early at your request on a former occasion classed my self among your *personal* friends in the county. Mr. Baird of Newbyth, supported by Lord Tweeddale and George Buchan-Hepburn, has offered his

<sup>1</sup> MSS., letter in my possession, R. Sinclair to D., Mar. 21, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 746, N.L.S., Robt. Baird to D., Mar. 30, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, H. H. Dalrymple to D., Apr. 2, 1795.

services, but any gentleman of the county patronized by you will, I am confident, prevail.<sup>1</sup>

Although he had succeeded in making his position clear to the ordinary voter, Dundas himself was far from being satisfied with the turn events had taken. He was disturbed by a letter from Baird informing him that the Marquess of Tweeddale had deceived him into thinking that Dundas would approve his candidacy. Two days later Dundas received one from Hew Dalrymple asking that the election be put off until August because he had just discovered that, on account of the carelessness of his agent, he would not have been legally enrolled in Haddingtonshire for a full year until that date.<sup>2</sup> Directly after this, arrived a letter from the Marquess of Tweeddale himself which seemed to beg the whole question and to misinterpret deliberately Dundas's plain statement that he, Dundas, would support Dalrymple. On the 3rd of April the Marquess wrote from his estate at Yester that he had supposed Mr. Baird to be 'the man in the County most agreeable to you'. His lordship also begged to observe that Dalrymple was disqualified and that he hoped Dundas 'would not conceive it necessary to take stringent measures in Mr. Dalrymple's favour'.<sup>3</sup> At this Dundas was up in arms. He no longer refrained from taking 'stringent measures'; to take any other course would be to allow Lord Tweeddale to become political leader of Haddington. To Baird, Dundas wrote from the Horse Guards on April 8:

My dear Sir:

I received your letter of the thirtieth March, having two days before learned from the Marquis of Tweeddale and Mr. Hamilton the resolution you had taken of offering your services to the county of East Lothian. I dare say those who advised you to take that resolution without any previous communication with me had reasons for doing so satisfactory to themselves, but, being ignorant of the nature and tendency

<sup>1</sup> MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., A. Mackenzie to D., Apr. 3, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, H. H. Dalrymple to D., Apr. 2, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, M. of T. to D., Apr. 3, 1795.

of those reasons, you cannot be surprised if I cannot discover any ground for them that did not tend to a separation of your interests and mine. *Perhaps it may be thought that the representation of any particular county or borough may not be of much personal consequence to me; but, when one finds himself in possession of an interest founded partly on private friendship, partly on family connections, partly on the gratitude of friends whom he has had it in his power to oblige, and partly, I flatter myself, on grounds of a still more public nature, he is not fond of allowing it to be frittered away without his own concurrence. I am well aware that different circumstances may have contributed to impair that interest which I conceived myself to possess. I have been necessarily prevented from going to Scotland for some years past, and it is not impossible that Intrigues may have been exercised against my interest that I had neither the means of watching nor counteracting. It is likewise possible that persons who had failed in obtaining new favours may have lost the recollection of old ones. But, be all that as it may, I am sure it is material for my own comfort to ascertain with precision what my interest is.* [Italics the author's.]

From the predicament in which matters are now circumstanced, this cannot be done but by my taking a decided line, and therefore, however disagreeable it is for me to take any measures hostile to a wish of yours, I feel myself necessitated on the present occasion to take a decided part in favour of Mr. Dalrymple, but remain with great regard, etc. etc.<sup>1</sup>

To the Marquess of Tweeddale Dundas wrote on April 23 in the same uncompromising manner. Thoroughly aroused at what he considered an insidious intrigue to undermine his power, he brushed the Marquess's protestations of political friendship aside as mere equivocation. It was not, he pointed out, for such treatment that he had allowed the Marquess the Lord Lieutenancy of Haddingtonshire when a word in the royal ear would have gained the appointment for a nobleman more steady in the support of Mr. Pitt. The Marquess must, he insisted in all candour, be aware that the pledging of Baird to a canvass without allowing him a moment's delay in which to consult his friends was inexcusable. 'You seem', he said in conclusion, 'to talk with some confidence of success; as to that your

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to Robt. Baird, Apr. 8, 1795 (copy).

lordship must be the best judge; I should rather doubt the accuracy of your calculations, but, under the predicament in which I have been placed, that circumstance, be it as it may, can make no variations either in my present feelings or future conduct'.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the complimentary language in which they are couched, these letters show the extreme irritation which Dundas felt at the slightest attempt to challenge his position as political master of Haddingtonshire, and his determination to leave no stone unturned to elect his nominee.

In May the Dalrymples succeeded in satisfying themselves that young Hew Dalrymple had a legal right to represent the county. His title, which was based on a 'superiority' bought by his father from a Mr. Cadell for a sum so large that Sir Hew Dalrymple insisted on keeping it a secret from his son, was submitted to the Solicitor-General, Robert Blair of Avontoun, an intimate friend of Dundas's. Blair declared it sound, as did also another Edinburgh lawyer, John Buchan.<sup>2</sup> It was probably soon made absolutely secure by the reconveyance back to Mr. Cadell of an equal 'superiority', for young Dalrymple wrote to Dundas that a Mrs. Hamilton of Belhaven had three 'superiorities', one of which he was sure he could buy for that purpose if Dundas asked the lady to sell.<sup>3</sup> Although Dundas probably complied with this request, he may not have been entirely satisfied that it was safe to hold the election in the spring. The returns show that Captain Hamilton-Nisbet retained the seat until November when the by-election actually occurred.<sup>4</sup> This delay may also be explained by the negotiations about the Haddington District of Burghs which began in this same month of May.

The Haddington burghs were at this time represented by Colonel Thomas Maitland, brother of the

<sup>1</sup> MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., D. to M. of T., Apr. 23, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, Sir H. Dalrymple to D., May 1, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, H. H. Dalrymple, Jr., to D., May 2, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> *Official Return.*



Earl of Lauderdale. It had occurred to young Hew Dalrymple that an arrangement might be made with the Earl of Lauderdale which would keep in Parliament one more friend of the Dalrymple family. He felt that Lord Lauderdale, if relieved of an expensive contest in Haddington burghs, would be willing to pay the election expenses of such a friend in an English borough or other constituency.<sup>1</sup> This scheme did not commend itself to Dundas in exactly that form. Some time later the much better plan was adopted of getting Lord Lauderdale to agree to support any one whom the Dalrymples might name for Haddington burghs provided Lord Lauderdale's brother received compensation elsewhere.

Both sides spent the next few months in electioneering, and the matter was not settled until September. Dundas then commissioned his nephew to propose a compromise settlement which would allow Baird to be elected for the Haddington *burghs*<sup>2</sup> under the agreement between the Dalrymples and Lord Lauderdale. Robert Dundas had no difficulty in getting Buchan-Hepburn's assent to such a plan, but Dundas's nephew received a cold reception when he called on the Marquess of Tweeddale. The Marquess still persisted in trying to thwart Dundas by claiming that Lord Lauderdale had not agreed to support *any* nominee of the Dalrymples for the burghs and that he certainly would not support Baird. At this Robert Dundas determined to do nothing until Lord Lauderdale had again stated his views in plain terms.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile Robert Dundas saw Baird and told him of Dundas's plan of compromise. Baird, who 'did not wish to be in Parliament for the burghs and would rather have had nothing to

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., H. H. Dalrymple to D., May 1, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 731, R. D. to D., Sept. 22, 1795. As an example of the use of money in Scottish elections, the fact that the Marquess of Tweeddale paid £150 to the trustee of Sir James Craig's estate for the vote on the estate is worth noting. Sir James, later Governor of Canada, was then in bankruptcy, and wrote Dundas of his intense mortification that his estate should vote against Dundas's interest. V. Mel. MSS., lot 746, Craig to R. D., June 5, and Craig to D., June 22, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 731, R. D. to D., Sept. 22, 1795.

do with them', agreed to Dundas's wishes with a great deal of reluctance.<sup>1</sup> Writing to his uncle of his decision to go no farther until he had heard from Lauderdale, Robert Dundas said:

Until this is done [i.e. the clarification of Lord Lauderdale's position] I hope you concur with me in opinion that you ought not to say a word further of any accomodation. . . .

The great object of Lord or rather of *Lady* Tweeddale is to establish their interest in E. Lothian and that is the reason for all this manoeuvring and stickling so much for Baird having the county. I *now* do not think you ought to agree to this, otherwise it would be immaterial whether Baird or Dalrymple had one or the other. In this opinion Hamilton perfectly concurs.<sup>2</sup>

To this Dundas replied from Wimbledon on September 25, 1795:

As to E. Lothian you have done exactly as you should have done, with this addition that if you find that either Lord Lauderdale or Lord Tweeddale have the most distant idea of creating any disturbance in the burghs in favor either of Col. Maitland or any other person, you will instantly insist with Dalrymple that he stands for the burghs and supports — [name of four letters illegible; probably Hope, certainly not Baird] for the county. I know I cannot force Dalrymple to this at the first election because I am engaged to him, but at the General Election, I can and will, if he is unreasonable.<sup>3</sup>

Buchan-Hepburn now took a hand in the negotiations by suggesting that 'the contending Kings of Brentford should go off arm in arm penning a whisper, after giving the Sec'y of State [i.e. Dundas] a *Carte Blanche* to settle and decide the matter betwixt them to prevent a division of *his* not *their* kingdom, because the man who has suggested wise and salutary measures in the most critical emergencies of the state can never think five minutes for an expedient to unite two rival candidates, both his friends'.<sup>4</sup> Buchan-Hepburn felt that 'he will be a bold man indeed who shall drag the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, R. D. to D., Sept. 22, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to R. D. (original).

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Hepburn to R. D., Sept. 25, 1795.

Secretary [i.e. Dundas] either as minister or as private gentleman by the hair of the head into the county room at Haddington to vote for him'.<sup>1</sup> This suggestion of a general arbitration was not followed because Robert Dundas soon received through young Dalrymple a definite assurance from the Earl of Lauderdale that he would support *any* Dalrymple nominee in the burghs.<sup>2</sup> On receipt of this, Robert Dundas wrote happily to his uncle on September 29, 1795:

The copy of Lord Lauderdale's letter which I enclose afforded me much satisfaction. It is clear, what I always told you, that Lord Tweeddale is only what his wife pleases, and the lie has originated with her, with the view of seducing us into a relinquishment of the county. I wrote Lord Tweeddale and Hepburn a fortnight ago that I would meet them tomorrow forenoon at Pencaitland.<sup>3</sup>

At this meeting at Pencaitland it was finally agreed that Baird should be elected for the burghs and Dalrymple for the county. In reporting his success to his uncle, Robert Dundas asked him to write personally to Lord Tweeddale that the plan agreed to was the best solution of all their troubles.<sup>4</sup> Buchan-Hepburn's account of these conversations at Pencaitland shows that, although Lord Tweeddale agreed to that plan on the understanding that Dundas would fully adhere to it, Lord Tweeddale nevertheless insisted on submitting several other possible plans to Dundas in writing. Presumably Lord Tweeddale's motive in doing this was his desire to prove to his friends that he had not tamely yielded to Dundas's dictation.<sup>5</sup>

To ratify the agreement, it was only necessary for Dundas to write as follows to Lord Tweeddale on October 3, 1795:

My Lord,

Wimbleton

The Advocate has by this day's post transmitted to me the memorandum of the conversation which passed between your

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Ld. Lauderdale to Capt. Dalrymple, Sept. 1795.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., Sept. 29, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., Sept. 30, 1795.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, enclosed in R. D. to D., Sept. 30, 1795.

lordship, him, Mr. B-Hepburn, and Mr. Hamilton. I am extremely happy that you have terminated the business in the manner you have done. Although I am aware that some friends of mine may think they had a claim upon me for support in the Burghs and may not be altogether satisfied that our contests did not go on. For my part, I so much abhor the bad blood created among neighbors by county contests that I am much relieved by there being an end to the one which (I am persuaded, from misunderstanding among us) had arisen in E. Lothian. I need not trouble your lordship with any detail on the subject, but I trust you will rest assured that the proposal made by the Advocate, and accepted by your lordship and Mr. Baird's other friends, was on mature consideration authorized by me as the only one that suggested itself as likely under all circumstances to put really an harmonious end to all our differences.

I have the honour to be, with great respect,  
Henry Dundas.<sup>1</sup>

After this, it only remained for the two candidates to write their circular letters to the freeholders of the county, the one, Baird, announcing his withdrawal from the contest for the county, and the other, Dalrymple, announcing that he remained in the contest and would receive Dundas's support. Apart from the remote contingency that some politically ambitious man of great wealth might bribe the burghs away from Baird, all was well. Robert Dundas reported to his uncle on October 27, 1795:

I received your letter from Walmer just as I was setting out from home to meet Baird and Dalrymple here on the subject of East Lothian. It is all settled and each have wrote their circular letters. It is unnecessary to add that we celebrated the agreement here last night with a plentiful dose of claret. You see how pleased Hepburn is on the event. You must use your influence with your friend Lord Elcho to support Baird in the boroughs, etc.; keep off Ainslie or anybody else, for Hamilton and I both agree that a few £1,000's would carry four of the boroughs any way the giver chose.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to M. of T., Oct. 3, 1795 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, R. D. to D., Oct. 27, 1795.

On the 30th Dundas wrote to his nephew of his pleasure at the conclusion of the whole business and of his intention of writing a curt letter to Buchan-Hepburn, 'whose recent conduct has certainly shown that if he had formed a conspiracy, he has certainly repented of it and got as quickly as possible out of the scrape'.<sup>1</sup> With this letter, the story of these long and involved negotiations ends. Dalrymple was safely chosen at the by-election for the county in November, and both he and Baird were chosen at the General Election in June 1796, the former for the county and the latter for the burghs. Above all else, these negotiations reveal the vigour and precision with which Dundas acted against the slightest sign of an attack upon his power in Scotland. He showed even his friends that they must play the political game as he *ordered* it played. As for his enemies, it is noteworthy that, in this dispute, on account of his remarkable talent for compromise, he not only gained his point but left Lord Tweeddale, and Lord Lauderdale as well, under obligations to the Dundas 'interest' which in the future might prove embarrassing to them and useful to him.

Fully roused by these events in Haddingtonshire to the dangers which beset him in Scotland, Dundas devoted much of his time in 1795 to electioneering. Among his letters are full canvass sheets for several counties where close contests were expected at the next General Election.<sup>2</sup> The extent to which the pressure of matters of state had forced him to neglect Scotland is indicated by another disturbance in the North. Early in the year, Sir James Grant announced his intention of vacating his seat in Banffshire in order to accept an appointment as cashier of excise in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Dundas thereupon got his friend William MacDowall of Garthland, the

<sup>1</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to R. D., Oct. 30, 1795 (original).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, Banff Roll, Michaelmas 1794; Inverness Roll same date; Moray (Elgin) Roll 1795; Clackmannan Roll 1795; Dumfries Roll 1795; Forfar Roll 1795, N.L.S.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, J., *Members of Parliament, Scotland*, p. 161.

member for Renfrewshire, to sound David MacDowall-Grant with regard to the latter's being a candidate for Banff, but neglected to push the business through quickly enough. Before he had made it definitely known whom he was supporting, a certain William Grant of Beldorny started a canvass and threw the county into confusion. David MacDowall-Grant wrote at once to Dundas for a definite pledge of his support and set the whole situation before Robert Dundas on April 26, 1795:

From the mode taken to bring Mr. William Grant in for the County of Banff, I presume Mr. Dundas may be ignorant of how politics stand in this county. . . .

When Mr. William was proposed a candidate for the county of Banff, it appeared strange to the freeholders how he could succeed, as not one of them had been canvassed or consulted on the subject. The general answer was, 'Lord Fife and Mr. Dundas have settled the business, and Mr. Grant cannot fail'. It is not surprising that the freeholders felt themselves hurt at being so treated, particularly as Lord Fife had neither sent nor come down to explain the business to many who were then his friends. Indeed when his lordship did arrive, he was not clear for supporting Mr. William Grant, *except on terms*.

Matters being thus situated, several of the freeholders called a meeting and got time to consult with each other and to form a joint interest, which will carry the county for or against any man who may or may not meet their approbation.

At the meeting they supported Sir George Abercromby. Prior to these meetings, I had canvassed several freeholders who had very handsomely promised me their support, but Sir George having got started earlier, had got a majority and I joined with him to preserve unanimity.<sup>1</sup>

After stating that Sir George Abercromby had withdrawn because he did not wish to risk his sheriffship on an uncertainty, MacDowall-Grant advised Dundas either to start a new candidate or to give his interest to the MacDowall-Grants or Colonel Duff.<sup>2</sup> Dundas very probably decided to run MacDowall-Grant, for that

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., MacDowall-Grant to D., Apr. 26, 1795; same to R. D., Apr. 26, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

gentleman was returned at the by-election.<sup>1</sup> At the General Election in the next year William Grant was returned for Banffshire.<sup>2</sup> This incident in Banffshire in 1795 shows that Dundas's hold on the North was none too strong, but its chief importance lies in the proof it gives of the political activity of the ordinary Scottish voter. It shows that Scotland was not completely apathetic politically. The small select oligarchy of Dundas, Lord Fife, the Duke of Gordon, and their like could not neglect their 'interests' with impunity or make themselves entirely immune from attack by independent voters' organizations.

There was also a political dispute in 1795 in Roxburghshire, where Sir Gilbert Elliot, then Governor of Corsica (later, as Lord Minto, Governor-General of India), accused Dundas of thwarting his political ambitions to represent the county. The fact appears to be that, although the Dukes of Buccleuch and Roxburgh, who absolutely controlled the county, had agreed to support Sir George Douglas, Dundas wrote to ask his friend the Duke of Buccleuch to support Elliot. When the Duke of Buccleuch replied that he did not wish to press the matter on the Duke of Roxburgh, Dundas informed Sir Gilbert Elliot that the matter would have to rest here, especially because in times past Elliot had opposed the Duke of Buccleuch.<sup>3</sup> Upon this, Sir Gilbert Elliot, smarting under what he considered a reproof from Dundas, wrote him a long and frank letter from Corsica on the whole subject of Roxburghshire politics:

I must make up my mind to my disappointment in Roxburghshire . . . I cannot at the same time avoid feeling some concern that you should appear in your letter to Admiral Elliot to think so lightly of my pretensions and expectations on this subject, and to treat me almost as very presuming and unreasonable for having ever supposed that I had a chance of being elected.

When I left England I was morally certain of my election

<sup>1</sup> Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Mar. 29, 1796.

for the County of Roxburgh on very good and sufficient grounds. With regard to Sir George Douglas, I had certainly no formal promise, when I joined him, to support me at the next election, either from him or the Duke of Roxburgh, and therein, perhaps, as a politician, I was to blame for not making my title more secure and faster.

The Duke of Buccleugh seems to consider me as having attacked his interest. God knows, if I did, it was sore against my will. But surely when the Duke of Buccleugh withdrew his support from me in the year 1786, I was under no obligation to relinquish my views in the county, and could not reasonably offend him by defending myself as well as I was able. At the next election I tried first for myself. That failing, it appeared that I held the balance. I had therefore to consider what was most favorable to my future interest, and I do not think the Duke of Buccleugh will blame me for doing so. I first offered to bring Jack Rutherford into Parliament if he would withdraw from the contest in Roxburghshire. This proposition, which was surely nothing to give anyone offence, was rejected with a very high tone. What was to be done next? If I had joined Rutherford, I felt that with the Duke of Buccleugh's support and the fresh claim that possession and his own activity and talents would give him, he was in for life—that if Sir George Douglas was elected, I should have a fair prospect of a future election.

If there is any thing in this letter that may be unfit for other eyes than those of a friend, I rely on your discretion and am sure no ill use will be made of it.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Gilbert Elliot's ambitions to represent Roxburgh again were never satisfied. Sir George Douglas or John Rutherford represented the county until 1812.<sup>2</sup>

In Kirkcudbrightshire, the death of Major-General Alexander Stewart gave Dundas an unexpected opportunity to emancipate that county from the control of the Earls of Galloway in 1795. He sent down a certain Patrick Heron to canvass the county and assisted Heron with patronage. Although Lord Galloway's party attempted the old trick of persuading the sheriff to set the election on a day when all their

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 723, Edwards, Sir G. Elliot to D., May 2, 1796.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return*.



opponents' voters could not come to the meeting,<sup>1</sup> Heron nevertheless carried the by-election in March 1795 and was re-elected at the general election of June 1796.<sup>2</sup>

Dundas's most serious defeat at this time occurred in Forfarshire, the home of his arch-enemy William Maule, Earl Panmure. A by-election as well as the general election occurred in this county in the spring of 1796, but all Dundas's efforts to hold the seat for David Scott, the Chairman of the East India Company, were unavailing. Maule won at the by-election, and Sir David Carnegie of Southesk, another of Dundas's enemies, won at the general election. The contests were so hotly fought that the candidates often considered a single vote of vast importance.<sup>3</sup> Dundas even wrote personally to win back the vote of one Hunter of Blackness, a tradesman, whom Maule had inveigled into supporting him by threatening to cease to buy at his shop. Matters were so desperate that Robert Graham of Fintry, the friend of the poet Burns, accepted with eagerness the suggestion that a few votes might be made for David Scott by hurrying on the weddings of heiresses in the county so that the votes belonging to the 'superiorities' on their estates might be used by their husbands or sold to others who would declare for Scott. Graham wrote complacently to Robert Dundas: 'Should the purchasers of the votes not like their bargain after the election, I am certain they can dispose of them without loss'.<sup>4</sup> When one of the marriages did not result as was intended, he wrote to Scott: 'It will be hard if we lose this vote after all which I by no means think unlikely, for, if the lady makes a point of it, the Major cannot refuse'.<sup>5</sup> Scott continually pestered Dundas and Robert Dundas about

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., P. Heron to R. D., Jan. 15, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>3</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 500. Several letters: Scott to R. D. undated, Ld. Douglass to Scott, Aug. 14, 1795, and other memoranda.

<sup>4</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 500, Graham of Fintry to R. D., Sept. 16, 1795.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., Graham to Scott, Oct. 17, 1795.

appointments that might be made to gain votes.<sup>1</sup> To save Dundas's time, he drafted letters which Dundas was to sign and send to various voters.<sup>2</sup> He got a letter written to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in order to get leave for a soldier in Ireland to come and vote for him.<sup>3</sup> He even asked that Pitt's personal support should be used for him in this contest. After all this campaigning, he was able to send Robert Dundas a full canvass-list of the voters which gave him a majority of only two.<sup>4</sup> Dundas and his nephew shook their heads over this, for they knew that many of the votes were doubtful, and they never had any real hope that Scott could ever win Forfarshire. Forfar was perhaps the only county in which Dundas, after doing his utmost to conquer it, was forced to admit defeat. Other counties, which were at this time not fully within his power, were to a greater or less extent attached to the Dundas 'interest', but Forfar never owed him any allegiance except during the few years after Scott's election in 1790. His own opinion of the county of Forfar is well summed up in a sentence which he wrote during this last ill-starred campaign of Scott's: 'The pictures of ingratitude which that county [Forfar] has exhibited are not to be paralleled even in all my political experience'.<sup>5</sup>

With the coming of spring in 1796, Dundas was busy with the final arrangements for the impending general election. The way in which prominent Scotchmen looked to him as the absolute arbiter of their political destinies is frankly revealed by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Hope, who wrote him during this campaign: 'If in your final arrangement for next Parliament, you should destine the Lintlithgow Burroughs for me, Charles Hope will do anything necessary in my absence'.<sup>6</sup> In fact, when the time came, it was not the Linlithgow

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., D. Scott to D., Oct. 26, 1795, and others.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Scott's draft of a letter D. was to write to J. B. Burges.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 731, R. D. to D., Sept. 22, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, D. Scott to D., Oct. 26, 1795.

<sup>5</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to R. D., Sept. 25, 1795 (orig.).

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession, A. Hope to D., Apr. 4, 1796.

burghs, but the Dumfries burghs which were 'destined' for this gentleman.<sup>1</sup> The canvass-sheets and political memoranda which were before Dundas in London during the first five months of 1796 show that close contests were expected in Ayrshire, Dumfries-shire, and Morayshire; Dundas wrote personally to voters in Ayrshire to support Colonel Montgomerie, in accordance with the Dundas-Eglinton agreement, but Robert Dundas felt that Ayrshire would be lost by a few votes.<sup>2</sup> In Dumfries-shire Robert Dundas could find a majority of only four for Sir Robert Laurie, whose old established interest was being attacked by Sir James Johnstone of Westerhall, brother of Sir William Pulteney.<sup>3</sup> In Morayshire, a difficult situation had been created when Sir James Grant's son, Lewis Alexander Grant, decided to give up a parliamentary career.<sup>4</sup> Alexander Cumming of Altyre entered the lists against James Brodie, brother of Dundas's friend, the 'nabob', Alexander Brodie. In this county, a majority of only *one* was forecasted for Brodie in May.<sup>5</sup> In Inverness-shire, Dundas had long before arranged with the Duke of Gordon that the mildly Jacobinical Colonel MacLeod should be replaced by a member of the Fraser family.<sup>6</sup> Dundas was not free from anxiety as to his own constituency, for Robert Dundas sent him a detailed list of twenty prominent persons (of whom Colonel MacLeod was one) who had attended a banquet at Edinburgh in celebration of Fox's birthday on January 25, 1796.<sup>7</sup> On this occasion, toasts were no doubt drunk to the confusion of 'Harry the Ninth'.

On the whole, although not serious, the situation in Scotland in the late spring of 1796 was such as to

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return*. See also MSS. entitled 'Political State of the Burgh of Lochmaben' 1795, lot 746, N.L.S., which shows how the Duke of Queensberry held absolute control of Lochmaben.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Feb. 14, 1796, and enclosure.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 746, Dumfries-shire Roll with pencilled comments.

<sup>4</sup> Fraser, W., *The Grants of Grant*, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., Moray Roll 1795. Gord. MSS.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Gord. MSS., D. of G. to D., Oct. 5, 1795.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 731, R. D., Jan. 27, 1796.

demand Dundas's personal presence in Edinburgh to conduct the campaign. He came North in late May or early June, and shortly thereafter wrote the following paragraph to Lord Hobart, then in India as Governor of Madras. It is undoubtedly the plainest statement of his political ambitions with regard to Scotland.

Edinburgh June 6, 1796.

My dear lord,

The place of my date will surprise you, but the surprise will cease when you learn that Parliament is dissolved. I have, with much inconvenience, been obliged to come to Scotland, not for any personal Election Interest of my own; all that is perfectly secure. But it appeared to me upon a full review of the subject that if I came to Scotland and exerted myself thoroughly, I might be able to prevent the return of any one Member for Scotland hostile to Government. The thing has never happened since the Union and the Temptation was strong to make the experiment. I am, of course, very busy, and it is my opinion at present that the whole forty-five Commoners and the whole sixteen Peers will be warmly in support of the persons and principles of the present administration. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The result of the General Election of June 1796 is indeed a tribute to Dundas as a political manager. His power never rose to a higher point, but it is impossible to conclude that 'the whole forty-five Commoners and the whole sixteen Peers' then elected were firm friends of Dundas and Pitt. As for the peers, three, Lord Breadalbane, Lord Tweeddale, and Lord Cassilis, were not Dundas's friends. As for the commoners, it is certain that Dundas controlled at least thirty-six, twenty-four members for counties and twelve for districts of burghs. Of the nine remaining, it is very probable that at least four were at this time friendly to Dundas, and it is quite possible that a majority of the other five, among whom was Sir George Keith Elphinstone, were favourably disposed towards Pitt's administration. Of these nine whose allegiance to Dundas is questionable, the enmity of only one, Sir David

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter-book in possession of Lady Melville at Eskbank 'Grange'.

Carnegie, the member for Forfarshire, is absolutely certain. Counties whose members probably did not give implicit obedience to Dundas are: Bute, controlled by the Stuarts, the family of the Marquess of Bute; Lanark, controlled by the Dukes of Hamilton; and Wigton, controlled by the Stewarts, the family of the Earl of Galloway. Dundas was strongest in central and northern Scotland. In the North he had captured Orkney for the Honyman family;<sup>1</sup> there was no election in Caithness;<sup>2</sup> he had secured the Tain District of Burghs for his nephew William;<sup>3</sup> and he remained in control of the counties of Inverness, Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray and of the Elgin District of Burghs in accordance with his agreement with the Frasers, Gordons, Duffs, and Brodies.<sup>4</sup> Dundas won all the contests which his nephew Robert had considered doubtful. Hew Montgomerie and Sir Robert Laurie were successful in Ayrshire and Dumfries-shire. There was as usual no trouble in the town or county of Edinburgh.<sup>5</sup> In the Stirling District of Burghs (Stirling, Inverkeithing, Dunfermline, Culross, Queensferry) Dundas had the satisfaction of seeing Sir John Henderson, no longer his friend, defeated by Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone, although Sir John kidnapped the Provost and councillors of Dunfermline and got his colliers to intimidate the townsmen with bludgeons.<sup>6</sup> No other extraordinary incidents seem to have marred an election day on which there were probably as few actual contests as there had been in 1790. Even though there were a handful of members then elected who

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See maps on this election in Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Henderson, E., *Annals of Dunfermline*, p. 534. 'For several days, Sir John kept his colliers parading the streets armed with bludgeons to intimidate voters and the incorporated trades. They broke their opponents' windows amid boisterous huzza's, forced entry into several houses, rang the Auld Kirk and Council Bells, and fired off Squibs and sky-rockets, thick and threefold.' The account says that at the election of a delegate to vote for the burgh, Sir John and an Edinburgh lawyer sent a smith to break open the Town-House, and carried the seven voters off to the Black Hole at Inverkeithing, from which they escaped at midnight and elected their provost delegate to vote for Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone.

were not absolutely under his control, Dundas, after his usual sojourn at his shooting lodge in the Highlands, must have returned to London highly satisfied with the results of his work in Edinburgh.

With his triumph at the General Election of 1796, Dundas reached the mid-point of his career as ruler of Scotland. On a foundation of an inherited family 'interest' in the Lothians, he had, during twenty-five years, built up a far larger 'interest', especially in the North, through alliances with noble families. In the midst of overwhelming official duties, he had, through co-operation with his nephew, carefully watched over that 'interest' and had increased it until he had almost made good his boast that he controlled thirty-nine of the forty-five Members of Parliament for Scotland.<sup>1</sup> In addition, he had secured a firm hold over the Scottish peerage. He was now to watch that 'interest' hold its own for a few brief years and then decline gradually to but a shadow of its former self. The story of its decline is similar to the story of its growth, but it is shorter, for Dundas's power never completely waned. To the day of his death, he was a great man in Scottish politics, and he bequeathed to his son a far greater political inheritance in Scotland than had been his when he became Solicitor-General in 1766. Since his power was built chiefly on alliances with influential families and upon private friendships sealed with political patronage, it declined with the weakening of those alliances and the snapping of those ties. The most important, although not the only, causes of this decline were the King's dismissal of Pitt in 1801 and Dundas's impeachment in 1805-6. The story of his last years is not one of the disintegration of a political machine through indifference. Dundas was often too busy to look after his financial or his political inheritance, but he was never indifferent. Even when his power was ebbing, his vigour and spontaneity in action seldom deserted him. He spent the last days

<sup>1</sup> *V. supra*, p. ix.

of his life writing letters to his son and nephew in an attempt to dictate the appointment as Lord Justice-Clerk of a young judge who had favourably impressed him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Lord Justice-Clerk was the active head of the Court of Justiciary, the highest criminal court. *V. infra*, p. 287.

## THE DECLINE OF THE DUNDAS 'INTEREST' 1797-1811

ALTHOUGH Dundas's candidates lost in only three of the seventeen by-elections which occurred in Scotland between June 1796 and the date of the next dissolution of Parliament in 1802, signs of serious weakness in his political machine began to appear as early as 1797, *four* years before the dismissal of the Pitt administration.<sup>1</sup> A few of the by-elections were very hotly contested and disaffection showed itself in two counties in the heart of the Dundas 'interest'. At the by-election in Kincardineshire caused by the death of Robert Barclay of Ury in April 1797,<sup>2</sup> Dundas and Lord Adam Gordon succeeded in returning their friend Sir John Belsches only with the greatest difficulty. Lord Adam Gordon had, himself, to leave his post as Commander-in-Chief in Scotland to go north to take personal charge of this election campaign. Other by-elections which, though successful, revealed weak spots in Dundas's political machine occurred in the Stirling District of Burghs in May 1797 and in February 1800. The first of these was caused by Andrew Cochrane-Johnstone's appointment as Governor of Dominica.<sup>3</sup> On this occasion Dundas chose to run William Tait, his confidential agent and solicitor. Tait was accordingly elected a burghess of Dunfermline on April 13, 1797, for the express purpose of being a delegate from that burgh to vote for his own election as member for the Stirling district.<sup>4</sup> Although he succeeded in having himself returned, all did not go smoothly, for the Earl of Hopetoun wrote that Mr. Wemyss of Cuttiehill had called a meeting at Dun-

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return*; and see map in Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., Ld. Adam G. to D., Apr. 10, 1797.

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, E., *Annals of Dunfermline*, p. 536.



fermline to petition for the dismissal of the Pitt administration. The Earl requested Dundas to dismiss one Hunt, a bank agent and one of Dundas's own appointees, who had been a ringleader in the business.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Tait died two years later, causing a by-election in the district. Although this was won by another member of the Cochrane family,<sup>2</sup> these burghs were in such a condition shortly afterwards that the Dundas party thought their further retention would involve too much expense.<sup>3</sup> Before the by-election, Robert Dundas wrote that the burgh of Stirling had already been lost,<sup>4</sup> and in the following June (1800) he wrote to his uncle:

James Horne, the Writer, who acted for Cochrane-Johnstone at the former election conversed with me yesterday on the subject of the Stirling boroughs. I gave on my part no satisfactory reply, not wishing to engage with him in business. But, from what he stated of the situation in Stirling and Culross, and what, even if Dunfermline stands firm, the leaders of that borough are most likely to expect at the General Election in addition to what it seems has already been given them, I feel it my duty to state to you that *three times* at least the sum you once pointed out will be necessary to carry the seat.

I held out John Cochrane as the man to whom he was to write, which, he is, of course to do this day and represented him [Cochrane] as possessed of a good office which perhaps might enable him to advance something to aid his brother's cause. . . . Cochrane-Johnstone has not, I am informed, paid several bills due even at the last General Election, and so far from compensating Horne for his trouble, that Gentleman states himself in advance for sums actually expended on his, Cochrane-Johnstone's, account.<sup>5</sup>

This letter shows more conclusively than any other that burgh elections went to the highest bidder. At the General Election of 1802, Sir John Henderson was

<sup>1</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 500, E. of Hopetoun to D., undated; reference to Tait's candidacy and to Dunfermline dates it 1797.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Return*, Alex. Forrester Cochrane elected.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., June 6, 1800.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., Feb. 15, 1800.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, R. D. to D., June 6, 1800.

returned for this district, but was unseated by the House of Commons in favour of Alexander Forrester Cochrane in 1803.<sup>1</sup>

The most serious signs of disaffection appeared in 1799 in Dundas's own constituency, the Town of Edinburgh. As the number of town councillors, who alone had votes, never exceeded thirty-three, it was not difficult to start an opposition among them to their representative in Parliament. When he first won the burgh for his 'interest', Dundas himself pointed out the danger that the councillors might, on occasion, be tempted to 'sell out' to a wealthy country gentleman with political ambitions.<sup>2</sup> It is very probable that there was always a small minority of councillors who were opposed to Dundas. In times of general dissatisfaction with Pitt's Government such as occurred in 1797, this number would naturally increase. The discontent in Edinburgh in 1797 did not die down, but grew and flourished, assisted by private intrigues in the council with regard to such matters as tax-rates and gild elections.<sup>3</sup> In March 1799, Admiral Cockburn wrote to Robert Dundas that the Lord Provost, Sir James Stirling, was not to be depended upon. His letter concludes with this serious warning:

Within these few days, I have learned enough to satisfy me that measures are taking at this instant to make a party in the Town connected with another in the County to cut up, root and branch, the interest of Mr. Dundas, and of you, and your family, in both places. . . . It was a blunder in him [i.e. Dundas] ever to have anything to do with the town.<sup>4</sup>

Matters came to a head in September, when Robert Dundas reported to his uncle that the Dundas and anti-Dundas factions were almost evenly divided at a gild election.<sup>5</sup> Robert Dundas insisted that, as it was impossible to communicate quickly enough with his uncle in London, he, William Dundas, and Charles

<sup>1</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>2</sup> *V. supra*, pp. 195-7.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Oct. 29, 1799.

<sup>4</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Laing MSS., ii. 671, Adm. Cockburn to R. D., Mar. 23, 1799.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Sept. 16, 1799.

Hope should be given complete authority to settle the business on their own responsibility.<sup>1</sup> Robert Dundas, hoping in this way to protect his uncle from defeat, carried on negotiations during the following month. On October 16, 1799, he wrote to his uncle:

On the subject of the town of Edinburgh, it is needless to trouble you. I suspect you do not entirely in your own mind agree as to the propriety or the necessity of the steps I have taken in that business. But, you may depend upon it, the *Revolution*, as Sir James [i.e. the Lord Provost] very truly terms it in his letter to you, is one to the side of our firm and steady adherents from those whose attachment was either doubtful or avowedly hostile to administration.<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks later he reported that all had been satisfactorily settled, and that the anti-Dundas faction had been reduced to six.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Dundas continued to represent Edinburgh in Parliament until he was raised to the peerage in December 1802.

During 1800 Dundas nearly lost the control of Aberdeenshire, which had been firmly within his grasp ever since his first agreement with the Duke of Gordon in the early 1780's.<sup>4</sup> His correspondence shows that Lord Fife had broken his alliance with him and was supporting the candidacy of General Hay, a member of the Marquess of Tweeddale's family, against Dundas's intimate friend, James Ferguson of Pitfour.<sup>5</sup> Late in June 1800, Robert Dundas wrote that, although Ferguson himself thought all was well, rumours were flying about in Edinburgh that Ferguson would be 'run very hard, if not beat' at the next election.<sup>6</sup> On receiving this information, Dundas wrote at once to the Duke of Gordon for assistance. The Duke replied on July 3, 1800, from Lord Adam Gordon's estate in Kincardineshire:

I received yours of the 27th ult. by last post. I have already

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Oct. 16, 1799.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, Oct. 29, 1799.

<sup>4</sup> *Official Return*.

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., July 4, 1800.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., June 23, 1800.

exerted myself for Pitfour, and you may depend upon my doing everything in my power to assist him. As for Lord Aberdeen's conduct, nothing can surprise me what he does. His ingratitude to you and Lady Jane, after the obligations he lies under to both, proves him to be a gentleman of not very nice feelings. You may remember how ill he behaved to Huntly [the Duke's eldest son] when he was raising his regiment. He gave him every opposition in his power and offered a bounty to every recruit who enlisted with Gen. Hay. It is lucky that his lordship has not much interest. . . .

I have gone over the Aberdeenshire Roll since I came here with Lord Adam, and he is clearly of opinion that Pitfour will carry the election and he is a much better judge of these matters than I am.<sup>1</sup>

The Duke sent a list of various voters who had deserted the Dundas 'interest' for many reasons.<sup>2</sup> On the following day, the Duke and Lord Adam Gordon went over the roll carefully and were forced to the conclusion that Ferguson's once large majority had been cut down to ten and possibly less.<sup>3</sup> The election expected in 1800 did not occur. Two years later Ferguson was successful and continued to represent Aberdeenshire until his death in 1820.<sup>4</sup>

These indications of weakness in Dundas's political structure do not show that it was badly threatened or would have tottered to its fall, unassisted by great political crises in the other parts of the realm. On the whole, all went on as usual during these years 1796-1801. Dundas revived his plan of attacking Sir John Sinclair in Caithness by using the ambitions of Colonel Anstruther.<sup>5</sup> He increased his control over the Linlithgow and Dumfries Districts of Burghs for the benefit of the younger members of the Earl of Hope-toun's family.<sup>6</sup> Perceiving that 'several of the Trotters are getting rich', although probably unaware of the extent to which their wealth was derived from specula-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., July 3, 1800.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, the same to the same, July 4, 1800.

<sup>4</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>5</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Oct. 17, 1799.

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., Chas. Hope to R. D., Apr. 30, 1800.

tions with the public money entrusted to his own care as Treasurer of the Navy, Dundas suggested to his nephew that they be qualified as voters in Midlothian.<sup>1</sup> The correspondence with his nephew with regard to the proper disposition of patronage continued unabated. His notebooks show the care with which every request, however small, was attended to.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the symptoms of weakness which appeared in Kincardineshire, Aberdeenshire, Stirling burghs, Edinburgh itself, and also in Kirkcudbrightshire, which was about to return to its bondage to the Earl of Galloway,<sup>3</sup> do prove that Dundas had over-reached himself in the election of 1796 and could not long have maintained his power at that high level, even if the question of Catholic emancipation in Ireland had not intervened to change the whole course of events.

On the dismissal of Pitt from office, the political confusion in Scotland was not so great as might have been expected. The one thing Dundas then insisted upon was that Addington should not disturb his political arrangements at home. When Addington attempted to interfere even slightly in Scotland, Dundas acted with his customary vigour in quelling disaffection. The following exchange of letters makes it entirely clear that, unless the Government had given Dundas a reasonably free hand in Scotland, he would not have been responsible for the maintenance in the Government's 'interest' of his host of followers. On January 31, 1802, Addington wrote to Dundas:

. . . I feel very uneasy at the information which reached me some time ago of the probability of a contest in the counties of Stirling and Fife. It had been represented to me that in the former the field was fairly open, and, as the battle was to be fought by the friends of Government, a strict neutrality was to be expected on the part of Government itself. I find, however, that the representation was not quite

<sup>1</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to R. D., Apr. 30, 1798 (orig.).

<sup>2</sup> The N.L.S. has the notebooks in which Dundas's secretaries entered a brief précis of every letter received and the reply made, but these books cover only the years 1797-1801.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., R. D. to D., Sept. 15, 1800.

correct; but that on the contrary an old interest which had been uniformly friendly to Government was threatened and that the interest so threatened was headed by an old political and personal friend of my own, the Duke of Montrose. I most earnestly and anxiously hope that the Opposition of Sir Robt. Abercromby will not be persisted in. If it should, there can, as I conceive, be no alternative to Government. Their good wishes and their assistance must be given to the candidate who is countenanced and supported by the Duke of Montrose; and, similar considerations, as far as claims upon Government founded upon long established interest and steady support can operate, apply to the competition for the County of Fife. I trust however that I may be spared the pain of acting in a manner that may not be entirely consonant to your wishes, or that may be otherwise than favourable to Persons so nearly connected with you as Sir Robt. Abercromby and Col. Hope.<sup>1</sup>

Dundas's reply to this was brief and to the point:

Edinburgh, Feb. 5, 1802.

My dear Sir,

I have this moment received your letter. Nothing, I am bold to assert, but the grossest misrepresentation could have induced you to write such a letter. In the case of Fife, the misrepresentation is so perfectly atrocious as to be perfectly ridiculous. If, under those circumstances, you chuse to proceed in the line of conduct your letter points at, the consequences must rest with you, not with me. I remain, My dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,  
Henry Dundas.<sup>2</sup>

On the same day Dundas wrote at much greater length to Pitt:

Edinburgh, Feb. 5, 1802.

My dear Sir,

I cannot refrain from troubling you with the Communication of the enclosed. I don't object to Mr. Addington's giving a preference, if he chuses it, to the nephew of William Elphinstone in Stirling supported by the Duke of Montrose, on the footing of *personal friendship*, or any other footing, over Sir Robt. Abercromby for whom I certainly shall vote, being a

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

freeholder of the county. But I feel it a strong proposition to be stated to me (because a representation has been made to him, in which there is not a particle of just statement), therefore I am to ask Sir Robt. Abercromby to withdraw from a most just pretension, supported, I affirm by the substantial Property of the County, and Captain Elphinstone, the Duke's protégé, without an acre of property in the County. The Duke of Buccleugh and Lord Dalkeith called upon me a few days ago to mention to me that the Duke of Montrose was much offended at being what he called opposed by me. I shewed them the State of the County, the Correspondence which I had with the Duke of Montrose, and the part I had taken in it. I believe they were not a little surprised at the representation they had heard. It is a delusion to talk of the Duke of Montrose's old established Interest. There is no such thing. I venture to assert that, taking away my own personal Interest (nothing to do with my public situation), His Grace's Interest hung upon a thread, and it is the discovery of that Mistake that now produces his dissatisfaction. If before taking his part the Duke had thought it worth his while to have any communication with me, I should certainly have sounded Sir Robt. Abercromby, through his nephew my Son-in-law, how far he had any objection upon a proper explanation, to postpone this pursuit. If Sir Robt. had not chused to do so, I should have felt it my duty to have given him any support in my power; and I should have thought it impossible that any Person living could have expected me to do otherwise. As for Government Interest in the County of Stirling, I protest I know not where it is. If the Duke of Montrose and Mr. Addington know where it is, His Grace will of course have the advantage of it and Mr. Addington may rest assured that, whenever the Interest of any of my Family Connections is concerned in any County or Burgh, if they cannot support themselves on the old hereditary friendships of our Family, or on our family Connections, or on that extended influence which near forty years of irreproachable public and private Conduct has obtained for me, he nor no Minister shall ever find me appealing to them for protection. I send for your perusal the whole correspondence which passed on the subject of Stirlingshire and you will be so good as to return it to me with your convenience, as also Mr. Addington's letter to me.

On the subject of Fifeshire, I can only express my wonder where Mr. Addington got his Information. There is not even a pretence for it. While General Scott lived, the County of Fife was in his possession. When he died, my Connection with him naturally devolved his Interest upon me. This circumstance, joined to the accident of my having in it many of my old School Companions and Friends whom I have had it in my power to serve and cultivate, has for more than twenty years given me in it the most preponderant Interest. That Interest will always be opposed to Henry Erskine, Sir John Henderson, and the Opponents of the Principles which I have invariably maintained; and if the present contest goes on, it is probable Sir William Erskine from Animosity or rather Opposition to me, will have the benefit of it. But I maintain Sir William Erskine came into the County solely by my favor, in compliment to the Memory of his Father, old Sir William. At the same time I give him full credit for the Assistance he received from his Brother-in-law, General Wemyss, an old and respectable family in constant political variance with Gen. Scott's Interest. You remember well the contest between Wemyss and Sir John Henderson, which of them we should support: and upon my Advice, Wemyss was preferred. This has procured me the inveterate Opposition of Sir John ever since. I could certainly quiet that if I was to cease to resist him in the Burghs of Dunfermline etc. That I certainly should not feel disposed to do, but I cannot submit to be told, when I am supporting my own Brother-in-law, the most respectable and popular man in the County, that I am intruding upon an old established Interest which it is the Duty of Administration to interfere to protect. I confess this Incident has raised many unpleasant Sensations in my Breast. I had no reason to look for it. If they let me alone and allow me to be quiet, they need not be afraid that I have any disposition to stand between them and the full exercise of their ministerial Authority, but it must be done with Decency, and above all, don't let them suppose that the means by which it is in my power to bear up the King's Government in this Country are of a nature to be dissolved by the Breath of any Minister.

Yours ever,

Henry Dundas.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in my possession (copy).



Two days later Dundas had apparently been satisfied that Addington would not interfere, for he then said in a letter to Pitt: 'If Mr. Addington had done as he menaced against Col. Hope in the County of Fife, he would have given himself a blow he is not aware of.'<sup>1</sup>

Although Dundas did not fail to use his power to support the Addington Government in the General Election of July 1802,<sup>2</sup> the breach between them may not have been entirely healed, for the candidates whom Addington had wished to support won in Fife and Stirling.<sup>3</sup> At this election of 1802 the Dundas 'interest' was cut down to twenty-two counties<sup>4</sup> and nine districts of burghs, thirty-one seats in all, and it is not even entirely certain that some of these, who were his friends in 1796, had remained loyal. In the peers' election Dundas also lost ground.<sup>5</sup> At least five of the sixteen were not his friends. At any rate, in view of the fact that he was out of power and in retirement, this is a showing which more than justifies his boast that the means by which he governed Scotland could not be 'dissolved by the Breath of any Minister'.

As we have seen, Dundas thereafter refrained almost entirely from political activity until Pitt's return to power in 1804, when he became First Lord of the Admiralty. On the one occasion during the previous two years when he did interest himself in a Scottish election, he appears to have failed. His candidate, Lord Kellie, at the by-election among the peers caused by the death of the Earl of Dumfries in 1803, lost to Lord Elphinstone 35-21.<sup>6</sup> With his return to power, Dundas had government patronage once more within his grasp and proceeded to use it in an attempt to regain control of Fifeshire.<sup>7</sup> He also succeeded in

<sup>1</sup> Chatham MSS., P.R.O., Dundas to Pitt, Feb. 7, 1802 (orig.).

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, J. A., *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Official Return.*

<sup>4</sup> See map in Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> Beatson, R., *Chronological Register*, iii. 143-4.

<sup>6</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, packet on Peers' Election, 1803. V. also lot 723, Edwards, Hugh Warrender to D., Apr. 8, 1803, and Gordon Corr., N.L.S., D. of G. to D., Apr. 15, 1803, and Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii, 461.

<sup>7</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., Kellie to D., Nov. 19, 1804, D. to K., Nov. 25.

maintaining his hold on the town of Edinburgh. On October 30, 1804, his son, who had taken Robert Dundas's place as Dundas's confidential agent in Scotland, wrote that Sir Patrick Murray would be perfectly satisfactory as candidate for Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> During these months Dundas spent a good deal of his time on the by-election in the peerage caused by the death of the Marquess of Tweeddale. He left no stone unturned to get his friend, Lord Kellie, elected, and even went to the extent of canvassing many peers in person.<sup>2</sup> Lord Kellie was successful.<sup>3</sup>

Even during the impeachment proceedings against him from March 1805 until June 1806, Dundas acted to protect his political friends in Scotland. On February 17, 1806, Lord Kellie wrote to Lord Napier: Ld. Melville [Dundas] wrote Lord Moira [friend of the Prince of Wales; Whig leader in Scotland] from Bath he had no objections to proposals in regard to Scotland, if they were approved by Lords Grenville and Spencer, provided he is assured that his (Lord Melville's) friends 'should not be disturbed in their present situations and that no violent measures should be used in the politics', or, in other words, that the ministry should not give support against the old members. On these conditions, Ld. Melville and his friends would support. It is supposed Lord Grenville will accept, but will not give patronage to Lord Moira or Lord Lauderdale.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, in the months preceding his trial, Dundas's political activities were in large measure suspended. It was not until his acquittal that he took up the cudgels once more, largely from a sense of duty to the memory of Pitt, whose death in January 1806 had been a far greater blow to him than the impeachment itself. On June 29, 1806, the Marquess of Buckingham wrote to Lord Grenville: 'Such a coalition (with the present Opposition) could not take place without including that acquitted man Lord Melville, whom *you* have saved, and who has instantly hoisted the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., Robt. Saunders Dundas (D.'s son) to D., Oct. 30, 1804.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Packet on Peers' Election of 1804. Kellie and others.

<sup>3</sup> Beatson, *op. cit.*, iii. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 461.

Indian and Scotch standard against you.'<sup>1</sup> The General Election of November 1806 left the 'Ministry of all the Talents' still in power, but the Dundas 'interest' in Scotland, which had been watched over by Dundas's son, still remained fairly sound. Twenty-six of Dundas's old friends were returned.<sup>2</sup> Dundas acted completely independent of the Government for the first time in his life. He was particularly concerned with the peers' election and circulated a list of his own. Seven of his list were elected,<sup>3</sup> but, on the whole, the old Dundas group of peers were badly beaten.<sup>4</sup> His letter to Lord Napier on the occasion of this election is of such interest as to be worth quoting at length. It shows that he had lost none of his zest for electioneering:

My dear Lord,

I don't like the aspect of the peers' election any more than you do, but you attribute the danger to a wrong excuse. My letter might do good and I know has done good to a certain extent, and it could not possibly do mischief. It certainly was not intended to influence any, nor could it possibly influence any but those who felt the services and character of Mr. Pitt a motive of influence with them. Although that motive operates, I hope, with some, I am afraid that even in the exalted order of the peerage, there are still more who look to the present powers, rather than to past services; all of these would have acted against you and others, whether they had or had not been reminded of their former attachment and professions of regard for Mr. Pitt. With those therefore of the description I last mentioned, my statement could do no good and as likely harm, for it would have suffered at any rate. The Circumstance your lordship mentioned is one of the good effects I hoped would result from it, viz. that it would put you at a certainty on whom you could depend; those who refuse to exchange would certainly have voted against you. This is not produced by my letter but by the ignominious pledge in which they bound themselves down

<sup>1</sup> Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. (1912), viii. 208.

<sup>2</sup> See map in Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 461, D. to Ld. Napier, Nov. 6, 1806.

<sup>4</sup> Beatson, R., *op. cit.*, iii. 144-6.

to Government: the danger to your lordship and other friends arises from quite a different cause. I mentioned it to you the morning Lord Haddington and you called on me, and I have wrote fully upon it since I came away both to the Dukes of Gordon and Montrose, and still more particularly to the Duke of Buccleugh. . . . If, in consequence of a reference to Mr. Pitt's name, it were possible to unite the great body of the peerage to act for a moment as a party, the business would have been safe for they would have avoided, as a party, giving a vote to any peer who did not concur on the same views with themselves. I am afraid it is impossible by any means to have made them act in that manner. . . . I cannot say it in more intelligible terms than by saying that all those acting under a mandate or recommendation of Govt. will act *as a party*, while those acting upon their own judgment will not. . . . [Here Dundas goes at length into the proper methods of electioneering.] . . .

With all these precautions, there may be some chance, but I am afraid there is a radical failing at bottom for which I can suggest no remedy. If all of any number of the Scotch peers can tamely bear (either from motives of ambition, interest, or the vanity of sitting in Parliament) without resenting it, to have Lord Semple proposed to them by any Government as one of their representatives, I am afraid there is a disease which has taken so deep a root, no cure will be found sufficiently efficacious to extirpate it.

I remain, my dear lord, yours very truly,

Melville.<sup>1</sup>

On the dissolution of Parliament in the spring of 1807, Dundas threw himself into Scottish electioneering with such vigour that his physician, Dr. Gregory, was compelled to remonstrate with him in these no uncertain terms:

St. Andrew's Sq. May 2, 1807.

My dear Lord,

I am very sorry to hear that you are *too well*, and that like other men who are too well, you presume too much on your health and strength.

<sup>1</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 461, D. to Ld. Napier, Nov. 16, 1806 (orig.). With regard to the contest in Aberdeenshire, Dundas wrote: 'Our friend Ferguson of Pitfour has had a hard struggle against the whole power and efforts of Govt., but we have carried it to his great joy.' V. Ferguson, J., *Records of Clan Ferguson*, p. 255.

A general election, especially if you are very successful in it, which I presume you will at present be, may prove more dangerous to you than ten Impeachments, perhaps as fatal to you as the Catholic Bill has been to Lord Grenville and Co.

I have no objections to your sending sixty-one members, Lords and Commoners from Scotland, to the new Parliament; but I have great objections to the eating and drinking and to the sedentary life and neglect of proper exercise connected with that kind of success. May I then take the liberty to remind you of some very good (but not very agreeable) advice on that subject which I gave you last autumn and which I hope the great Sir Walter Farquhar had the grace to second and enforce.

If not, allow me to suggest to you the excellent advice which Sancho Panza received from his very able physician Dr. Tirtea Fuera at his first public dinner when he took possession of the Island of Barataria. I know you will not comply with it strictly, but the nearer you come to it, the better it will be for you.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient servant,  
J. Gregory.<sup>1</sup>

The bulk of the canvassing was done by Dundas's son and Alexander Colquhoun, then Lord Advocate. Their correspondence shows two failures, Kincardine,<sup>2</sup> Haddington burghs,<sup>3</sup> and one success, Dumbarton.<sup>4</sup> In the whole of Scotland, the Dundas 'interest' lost heavily and must have been reduced to not more than twenty-four seats. In the peers' election there was a great improvement, for Dundas's old friends came back in full force. All except one peer of the sixteen were on the list which the Duke of Buccleuch distributed in Dundas's behalf before the election.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., letter in possession of Lady Melville.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., A. Colquhoun to R. S. D., May 3, 1807.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 746, H. Donaldson to —, June 1, 1807. This shows the legal tangles in a contested burghs election. *V.* also lot 731, R. D. to R. S. D., 'Ld. Elcho will infallibly carry the seat next election. With his rage for borough politics and his feeling that these are and ought to be his family inheritance, he must with the Wemyss fortune carry both Lauder and Dunbar wherever the sinews of war are his.'

<sup>5</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 461, D. of B. to D., May 8, 1807.

During the following year, Dundas still considered himself manager of Scotland and resented any attempt on the part of the Government not to let him have a free hand. When a certain Lady Rothes attempted to get Scottish patronage elsewhere, he wrote to her:

Dunira, Dec. 26, 1807.

Madam,

I have the honour of your ladyship's letter. I am sorry I am incompetent to give you any advice on the subject of it. For above thirty years past, his Majesty's servants (with a small interval of time excepted) have solicited my advice and assistance in the Administration of the Affairs of this part of the Country, and in the arrangement and distribution of the Patronage connected with it in such a manner as might most essentially tend to strengthen His Majesty's Government. It was always an irksome and unpleasant business, but, being myself a Member of Government, it was my duty to comply with the wishes of His Majesty, and I believe justice has been done to me in believing that I have done the duty successfully. When the present Government was formed, the Duke of Portland solicited me to undertake the same task, and, although not a part of the Administration, there were circumstances at the moment which induced me to acquiesce in the proposition, taking it for granted that, as formerly, the Patronage connected with this Country in the gift of the various departments of Government would be considered as amongst the requisites necessary for a successful administration of it. Some recent circumstances have led me to believe that a different idea is entertained in some of the Departments of Government and particularly at the Post Office. I therefore feel myself perfectly relieved from any obligation to interfere in the local arrangements of this country, and I have troubled your ladyship with this detail in order to satisfy your ladyship why I am precluded from entering into any discussion on the subject of your letter. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In reporting this incident to his nephew, Dundas said:

The enclosure will show you a very curious manoeuvre that has been attempted. For understanding it, you will be informed that Lord Leslie is brother-in-law to Lord Chichester, and there can be no doubt that he is destined by him as the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., D. to Lady Rothes, Dec. 26, 1807 (copy).

successor of Lord Gray in the Post Office. But in order to avoid the difficulty he may be exposed to if a similar interposition should take place as did formerly with Lord Sandwich, he wishes to have the cover of saying it was wished for or recommended by me. I am too old to be taken in by such a manoeuvre and therefore have wrote such an answer to Lady Rothes as Lord Leslie will certainly show to Lord Chichester, so that his lordship will act with his eyes open, and if Robert [i.e. Dundas's son] keeps a copy of my letter to Lady Rothes he can make use of it on this or any other occasion he sees cause. I am determined upon my line of conduct and it is certainly but fair to the Duke of Portland that he should not long be kept in ignorance of the real state in which the politics of this part of the country will speedily be. . . .<sup>1</sup>

After 1808 there is little indication that Dundas was able to take a very active part in Scottish local politics. He was always there, ready to give his son and nephew advice, ready to write personally to voters at their behest, but he no longer was conversant with every detail in every county. He often did not know whom the Government was supporting. Nevertheless he was a power to reckon with to the very end. During the last months of his life he interested himself in election contests in Renfrew,<sup>2</sup> Stirling,<sup>3</sup> Roxburgh, Ayr, and Lanark. In Roxburghshire he examined the roll of freeholders and wrote on the back of a letter Sir Walter Scott wrote to him:

I doubt this proposition very much [Sir Walter had said that all was going well]. It may by every exertion be brought back, but at present Mr. Elliot stands with a majority on the Roll of at least 14, and of the non-declarants he has his fair chance.<sup>4</sup>

In Ayrshire, one of the Montgomeries, though defeated, wrote of him:

I have also to express in the strongest terms my sense of the obligation I lay under to Lord Melville for the warm and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, D. to R. D., same date.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lot 746, letters between R. S. D. and B. Alexander, 1810.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Stirling Roll, 1810-11.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., Scott Corr., N.L.S., Sir Walter S. to D., Feb. 20, 1811.

active part his lordship took in the contest, and I have only to regret that, from unavoidable circumstances, it was impossible I should have made an earlier communication with you [Dundas's son] on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

The following letter which Dundas wrote to Lord Douglas four months before his death shows the keen interest which he still maintained in Scottish local politics and the great scope of his knowledge. The letter is a brief political history of Lanarkshire.

Melville Castle, Jan 30, 1811.

My dear Lord,

I yesterday received your letter with its enclosure. I have no doubt that your son should avoid laying himself under unnecessary obligations by assembling his friends for a purpose which must at present be unavailing. The mode and the time of doing it admits of further consideration according to circumstances.

As to the suggestion in your letter respecting the feeble support you have received from government, I am really incompetent to form any opinion, for, from the period of Mr. Pitt's death to the present time I have not been in any confidential habits with any minister, but, so far as I can judge from an inspection of your Roll, I am rather inclined to think that no exertion of Government Interest could have enabled you to counteract effectually the Hamilton Interest, from the Dissolution of Mr. Pitt's Government to the present day, nor do I think it will be accomplished for a considerable time to come. Various circumstances concur to induce me to entertain that opinion. The interest of the Hamilton family was at all times naturally the paramount Interest in Lanarkshire. There is at this day more real spirit of Clanship in that county than what now remains in most counties of the North; and, with very few exceptions the connection and descendants of the Family of Hamilton have kept in a body, and notwithstanding much neglect and mismanagement they have generally rallied to their standard when the Interest of the Family of Hamilton was at stake. This Interest, however, was frequently foiled and defeated by well-digested and well-managed combinations of other interests in the county. The Great Engine by which this was effectuated was

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., Gen. Montgomerie to R. S. D., Mar. 1811.



an union of the Upper Ward against the Nether Ward of Clydesdale, and the Center and Springs of this confederacy was the old Earl of Hyndford resident at Carmichall, and my brother, after his marriage with Miss Baillie, living in great hospitality at Bonington with a house constantly open and full of Mutton and Claret. I need not tell you that this division of Interests and Jealousy between the Upper and Lower Wards is now quite annihilated as to any political effects, and upon investigating your Roll sent to me, I observed a very considerable number of those who used to be steady supporters of the Upper Ward Interest standing in the list of Lord Archibald Hamilton's friends.

Without therefore enlarging on this variation in the local state of the county, your Lordship will readily perceive that it is highly favorable to the Hamilton Interest and will continue to be so unless some change of circumstances shall arise to unite again some such County Confederacy as that which I have described. But this is not the only or perhaps the chief support which the Family of Hamilton at present enjoys. The Jacobinical spirit introduced into the country a considerable number of years ago and still confederated together under the name of the Foxite Interest has been and continues to be the great Prop of the Interest of the Hamilton Family in Lanarkshire. There are very few of the great families of Scotland of Jacobinical Principles and not many attached on any principle to the coalition which forms the present formidable Opposition to His Majesty's Government. I believe I am not very far wrong when I say there is scarcely any family of very high rank except the family of Hamilton or any proprietor of any great property truly and genuinely attached to the real Foxite party except Mr. Maule. They naturally are looked up to as their main Pillars, and whenever their interest is in any respect attacked or in danger, there is not a Jacobin or a Foxite in the whole country that will not step forward to protect their interests at any risk or inconvenience to themselves. Keep these observations in your mind and look over your Roll with attention and you will speedily discern the irresistible weight or support that Lord Archibald Hamilton derives from it. I can myself count not less than nineteen of that description whom the support of Government to your Interest might more strongly confirm, but would never shake. I am ready to admit that a very

great part of their support rests on a hollow and rotten foundation and will most certainly moulder away, but its fall will not be by any vigorous exertion at the present moment. It will take place gradually if proper attention is paid to watch it and take advantage of circumstances as they occur. I would have added a great deal more, but am tired of writing and must conclude.

Yours truly,  
Melville.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the best indication of the political bondage to which Dundas's sway had reduced Scotland is given by the anonymous author of a 'Political State of Scotland, 1810', found among Dundas's papers. According to this pamphlet, there were, at Michaelmas in that year, only *seventeen* seats which were *not* certain to be won for Government 'Interest' by the full exertion of the Lord Advocate and his friends.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1811 Dundas, still apparently in his usual health and spirits, could look back on forty years or more of intense political activity. Disappointed as he must have been that he had never fulfilled his ambition to return every Scottish Member of Parliament, his accomplishment was one of which he might well be proud. By a judicious combination of tact and firmness, he had in former years built up an ascendancy in Scotland which, coupled with his own talents and native industry, enabled him to rise to the highest offices within the gift of his sovereign. It is true he had been a shrewd politician. In many subtle ways he had insisted that the political game must be played as *he* wanted it played. He had drawn into his net not only that host of devoted followers, the 'friends' whose advice he always asked before he acted, but also those unfriendly individuals who would have wished to remain free of all ties had they been able to provide for themselves or their relatives without the assistance

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 746, N.L.S., D. to Ld. Douglas, dated 1811; from Ld. Douglas to D., Jan. 27, 1811. Dundas's letter is a copy signed by his own hand.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, MSS. folded and endorsed on back 1810 Nov.

of Government or Indian patronage. Quick to reward the disaffected with favours as soon as he had taken them into his camp, he had not left an ever-increasing number of disgruntled and disappointed men behind him to plot for his complete overthrow. Although he would doubtless have admitted that his firmness was not without a tinge of unscrupulousness, he would have pointed out that every political compromise which welds together numbers of formerly conflicting 'interests' must leave some one in the lurch. Great as had been his skill at this work, he had never, even with the assistance of a political system so full of abuses, been able to enslave Scotland completely. His power had not reached perfection and had declined sharply as soon as he left office and was forced, on account of ill-health and impeachment proceedings, to depend upon the efforts of others. Nevertheless, sad as it must have been to contemplate the disintegration of the political alliances which he had so carefully arranged, Dundas never for a moment thought as he neared seventy of ceasing to do what he could to guide the destinies of Scottish politics and strengthen the 'interest' of his family.

On hearing of the death of his friend the Lord President, Robert Blair of Avontoun, Dundas hurried to Edinburgh from Dunira on May 21, 1811, with his mind full of plans for the promotions in the ranks of the Scottish judiciary which this vacancy would entail. He exerted himself so strenuously during the next three days in writing letters and holding conferences in an attempt to promote young Lord Boyle to the headship of the criminal court that it required the united efforts of his nephew and other friends to cause him to desist from this extraordinary scheme which would have placed Charles Hope in the Lord Presidency, passing over completely the pretensions of the Lord Advocate, Alexander Colquhoun. Thoroughly tired out, Dundas left for Arniston to be with his daughter Elizabeth over the week-end, but returned to George Square on the

evening of the 27th, dreading the funeral of Blair, which was to occur on the next day. After spending an hour or two writing more letters, he retired to his chamber, unaware that the death which he had so long expected was to come to him quietly in his sleep. So calm and peaceful was the expression on his face when his servant entered on the following morning that it was evident that he had passed away without a struggle. Henry Dundas died, as he would have preferred to die, in harness; and we may well close this account of his active life with a quotation from the letter of condolence which his son received from Walter Scott shortly after his father had been laid to rest in an aisle of the old church at Lasswade in Midlothian. After expressing his sorrow at the loss of a dear friend and a patriot whose like his country would not see for a century to come, Scott wrote:

. . . The inevitable law of nature, that sad reflection *humana perpessi sumus* supplies the only consolation that so grievous a dispensation will admit of, unless we should add to it the reflection that our departed friend was removed in the full enjoyment of his admirable faculties and without any painful interval of bodily complaint. In common cases indeed the twilight of the understanding and decay of the frame which often precedes the close of existence may be considered as a preparation to wean the sufferer himself from the love of life and to prepare his friends for his removal from among them. But who could have wished that to save ourselves the suddenness of this most unexpected blow Lord Melville's noble intellect should have lost the least of its brilliant acuteness or that he should have been even for the shortest space subjected to pain or even the necessity of inactivity. It is thus I endeavour to reconcile myself to a mode of dissolution which, within so short a space, has deprived me of two friends whom I honoured more than any who remain behind, since their kindness to my youth, and friendship since my more advanced age render my regret for their loss almost filial.

I do not ask you to forgive this intrusion which I have purposely delayed until I understood you were about to leave Edinburgh. The world is before us both, and while you

in the discharge of your important duties will, I am sure, always remember the example of such a father, it shall be my prayer to God that, in my very subordinate walk, I shall never be found altogether [unworthy] of the regard with which Lord Melville honoured me.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., N.L.S., Scott Corr.



## CONCLUSION

TO those who have not met them face to face the statesmen of bygone ages must remain to a great extent dim and shadowy figures. Even though, for the eighteenth century, we have portraits and statues to depend upon which are admittedly more true to life in most cases than those of the preceding centuries, we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that the artists of that age failed to flatter their subjects. The portrait of Dundas by Raeburn now in the National Gallery no doubt gives an excellent impression of his dignity of bearing and nobility of countenance on solemn occasions,<sup>1</sup> but any one who wishes to get closer to the real man should visit the Parliament House at Edinburgh. Here, in the statue by Chantrey which stands at one end of the hall, is no smooth-faced peer faultlessly bewigged and robed. We see a large powerful frame and a rugged Scottish visage, the nose somewhat prominent, the eyes deep-set under beetling, hairy brows. Yet, even here, we are still far away from the reality. In life, those eyes had a keenness and penetration all their own. To Walter Scott and many others of his contemporaries, the secret of Dundas's magnetism lay in his keen, compelling glance, which drew men to him in spite of themselves. Writing to thank Dundas's son for a proof-print of his father, Scott said:

. . . I have to express my gratitude to your lordship for a most valuable proof of your friendship and esteem in a proof-print of the late Lord Melville so like him that it made me melancholy for the whole day after looking at it. It is a capital print and does honour to the artist who has caught more happily than I thought possible the spirit and expression of the countenance and even the very remarkable brilliant and piercing glance of the eye which, in the regretted original,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lockhart's remark: 'It is not often nowadays that an artist can hope to meet such a union of intellectual and corporeal grandeur as were joined together in this friend of William Pitt.' Caw, J. L., *Scottish Portraits*, ii. 69.

had more of command and penetration than I ever saw in another countenance.<sup>1</sup>

In former years, no one had known better than he that merriment as well as intelligence lurked in those eyes. It was a custom in the Scott family that, whenever Dundas visited them, the children should be allowed to sit up to supper while he told stories.<sup>2</sup> Dundas liked nothing better than to spend an idle hour with children or old ladies. After a hard day at the India Board, it was his delight to go out riding with his young daughter Montagu, who amused him by collecting every political lampoon against Pitt's Government she could lay hands on.<sup>3</sup> He took a great interest in his son's education, knew the merits and demerits of boys' schools, and even went so far as to advise one mother that there was no bad habit that a boy could learn in England that he could not also learn in Scotland.<sup>4</sup> To his own mother and his elder sister Christy, who loved him and followed his political fortunes with the greatest interest, he was always chivalrous. Unable to get away from London for the celebration of his mother's eightieth birthday, he accompanied his flowers with a letter wishing her continued repose and tranquillity because 'more thorns than roses' had marked her path through life.<sup>5</sup> Even at the height of his power, he never failed, when on a visit to Edinburgh, to while away an afternoon in climbing the winding stairs of the old houses in the closes and wynds of the High Street to pay his respects to the old ladies whom he had known in the days of his youth.<sup>6</sup>

It is hard to believe that the private life of so genial and merry a soul, beloved by young and old, should not have been above reproach. In fact, we may do

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Scott Corr., N.L.S., Walter Scott to R. S. D., Nov. 17, 1811.

<sup>2</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb.

<sup>4</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., ii. 501, D. to R. D., Feb. 17, 1798 (orig.).

<sup>5</sup> MSS. Fam. Alb.

<sup>6</sup> On this subject, see Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 124.



well to discount heavily the implications to that effect which may be found in the work of some contemporary memoir-writers. Though it is said that Dundas's scandalous private life was the chief cause of the King's dislike of him, there is nothing in his private correspondence now available which gives these innuendoes the slightest colour of authenticity. Tongues were no doubt set wagging by his first wife's dramatic desertion of him in 1778. Had she not gone off with a lover and deserted her children as well, the case against him might have elements of strength, but, as it is, we are led to infer that Dundas, too much absorbed in politics, merely failed to give a high-spirited girl the attention she demanded. Apart from flirtations with Lady Louisa Stuart<sup>1</sup> and Lady Charlotte Gordon,<sup>2</sup> he does not seem to have paid much attention to women for other than political motives until his second marriage to Lady Jane Hope, daughter of the Earl of Hopetoun, in the 1790's. Even this marriage, though uniformly happy, had a political side, for Lady Jane proved herself an able political campaigner during the last decade of her husband's life. Unquestionably, when beauty and politics mixed, Dundas had an eye for both and was past master of the art of charming women whom he wished to use to gain his political ends. The Duchess of Gordon is a case in point, but he waded so successfully through masses of public documents which would have taken an ordinary mortal twice the time that it is entirely unlikely that he can have found time to live the scandalous private life attributed to him by the gossips. No doubt he was a heavy drinker, and, on occasion, may have indulged in coarse humour. These were common vices of the age. The ludicrous midnight encounter of Pitt and Dundas with a turnpike-keeper who thought

<sup>1</sup> MSS. Fam. Album. Typed copy of letters printed in *Gleanings from an old Portfolio*, edited by Mrs. Godfrey Clark, Edinburgh, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Wraxall's story of D.'s diverting Pitt from Lady Charlotte by courting her himself, see Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 29. Wraxall, *Posthumous Memoirs*, iv. 462.

them tipsy thieves was broadcast in song and caricature through the length and breadth of the land, as was also their famous, but probably mythical, greeting to the House of Commons: 'I can't see the Speaker, Hal, can you?' 'See the Speaker, hang it, I see two.' If drinking be a proof of immorality, Pitt, whose morals have never been called in question, must be condemned along with Dundas. On the whole, we have a feeling that the gossip about Dundas's private life deserves to be entirely ignored. Had he lived such a life, he could not have been so universally esteemed as a 'good fellow'.

A reputation for good-fellowship is seldom gained by persons of a reforming temperament. Zeal for a 'cause' was no part of Dundas's make-up. He and Wilberforce, though both Tories and close friends of Pitt, were poles apart in ideals and outlook on life. Dundas took the world as he found it. The political system was full of anomalies and absurdities, the public servants were inefficient, the slave-trade was an evil, but the King's Government had to be carried on. Some one had to 'get things done', and Dundas was the man to do them. He knew how to deal with men whose sole considerations were those of place and profit for themselves and their descendants. He was not so obtuse as not to see that it was regrettable that Government could not do without the support of the utterly selfish or that there were grave injustices under the existing order of things, but he felt that, on the whole, the British constitution worked well. No one could have convinced him that Scotland could have been governed better than he governed it, for no one could prove that, under a democratic franchise, the country would not fall a prey to a demagogue whose rule might be infinitely worse. Always more concerned with the present than with the future, he preferred to ameliorate existing inequalities and injustices by open-handed generosity of the free and hearty sort.

Though quite consciously the *grand seigneur*, Dundas

never lost touch with the wants and struggles of the mass of the people. Busy as he was, he did not allow his secretaries to ignore the appeals for money that came to him through the post. Even if he could not read every letter himself, no detail was too small to escape his attention. One of the most touching letters is that from a convict at Botany Bay, whose boy Dundas has placed at a 'bluecoat' school.<sup>1</sup> Of the 'begging' letters, nearly all were answered, often with small gifts of two or three guineas.<sup>2</sup> When Dundas considered the person in question to have no claim on his charity, he gave the letter to one of his colleagues with his advice on the answer to be made. In 1797, he was so moved by an appeal from a Scotchman who had lost both legs in the West Indies that he wrote to his nephew: 'It is really so piteous a case, I wish you could suggest to me some way by which I could serve him in Scotland compatible with the circumstances of his unfortunate situation.'<sup>3</sup> The spirit in which he received requests of a more annoying nature is shown by his instructions regarding a reply to an ensign who had asked for £10. Beside his secretary's summary of the letter, he wrote:

. . . If I was perfectly certain this was a true statement, I should be inclined to give him the ten pounds he asks, but it is very like a swindling letter. I know nothing of him. Send the letter to Mr. Garshire and ask what he knows of him.<sup>4</sup>

The welfare of the East India Company's servants was always his special care. In pushing forward plans for Government aid for the many orphans of European

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., miscellaneous, lot 754, Edwards.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 729, N.L.S., book for Sept. 1798-Jan. 1799, instructions for reply to Mrs. Emar, Dec. 14, 1798; book for Jan.-Mar. 1800, same *re* Mrs. McNeil, Mar. 17, 1800; book for 1800-1, same *re* Miss H. Poole, Nov. 1, 1800, and same *re* B. Marchent, Dec. 1, 1801.

<sup>3</sup> Laing MSS., Univ. of Edinr., D. to R. D., dated Walmer Castle, Oct. 12, 1797 (orig.). Letters in Mel. MSS., lot 731, N.L.S., show that this man was appointed Collector at Alloa.

<sup>4</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 730, N.L.S., instructions for reply to Ensign Mitchell, Aug. 8, 1797.

parentage left in India,<sup>1</sup> and in giving Indian appointments to young Scotchmen who were *not* recommended by the best families, he made himself still more esteemed in both Scotland and India. By his bitterest enemies, such manifold generosity as his was set down to political shrewdness of the cleverest type, but those who knew him best recognized it as characteristic of his genial and lovable nature.

Political shrewdness, of a certainty, played little part in his generous patronage of those who were to do Scotland credit in the world of arts and letters. More appreciative than Pitt of the worth of literary and scholastic endeavour, he loved to play the role of the Scottish Maecenas. His house at Wimbledon was the scene of that famous dinner at which Pitt bade Adam Smith be seated first with the words, 'We are all your scholars'. At any time, a request from a Scottish author, historian, or divine would gain Dundas's sympathetic attention. In addition to Walter Scott, whom he had the opportunity to serve in the first decade of the century, he assisted Archibald Alison, Adam Ferguson, Alexander Carlyle, and Thomas Somerville. His connexion with India brought him into contact with Sir William Jones, one of England's first great orientalists, who began the task of making the Western world acquainted with the law, literature, and customs of ancient India. In his correspondence with Jones, Dundas showed a keen interest in matters concerning the welfare of the Indian native which would not ordinarily be expected to have claimed the attention of a President of the Board of Control.<sup>2</sup> Even more important was his patronage of John Bruce, one of the first historiographers of the East India Company.<sup>3</sup> It was largely at Dundas's insistence that the post of

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Lady Campbell, dated Wimbledon, Aug. 2, 1787 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Sir William Jones, July 29, 1787 (copy). See also 'Ld. M.'s E. I. Cat.' under Jones, and Mel. MSS., lot 703, Sir W. Jones to D., Mar. 1, 1794.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, Sir Wm., *John Company*, pp. 243-9.

historiographer, with a substantial stipend, was created. Bruce, who had first come to his notice as tutor and companion to young Robert Dundas during the latter's stay at the University of Göttingen, was employed by Pitt's Government in many other historical projects. He brought Dundas's attention to the deplorable condition of the public records, and helped in the reorganization and reclassification of the records in a State Paper Office which later became the present Public Record Office. This work, together with other research on Ireland and on the Dutch East India Company, greatly delayed the execution of Bruce's history of the English East India Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, much of which still exists only in his manuscript at the India Office.<sup>1</sup> As a result of his interest in literary projects such as these and of his own legal learning, Dundas may well have felt that the academic honours conferred upon him by the three universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews were in some sense deserved.<sup>2</sup>

Spending his life in the thick of the political struggle, Dundas was human enough to make political expediency one of the chief guides of life. In this direction, he undoubtedly went farther than Pitt, but there was a point beyond which he would not go. Although there is some truth in the contention of his enemies that he was a 'trimmer' guided by few fixed principles, no consideration of political advantage would induce him to recommend for an important appointment a person who was conspicuously unfitted for it. There are a number of interesting instances of his refusal to make Scottish appointments precisely on these grounds. It was his practice to inform himself fully of the circumstances of every case before he made a decision. Whenever he felt that he did not possess sufficient data upon which to act, he would write to his nephew or other

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* See also Mel. MSS., miscellaneous, Edwards, for two or three letters from Bruce.

<sup>2</sup> Hon. LL.D. Edinburgh, 1789; Lord Rector, Glasgow, 1781-3; Chancellor, St. Andrews, 1788. See Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

agent that he was 'incompetent to judge' or 'must suspend' his opinion until he knew more about the case.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it was somewhat of a shock to Scottish officials to find that Dundas's son, after he came into power, made decisions without consulting them. In 1810 Dundas's nephew wrote to young Robert Dundas:

. . . Let me advise you, and I am sure it is sound advice, not to decide so rapidly as you did in the last case, at Inverness,—but do as your father wisely did in all these cases, take the opinions of such friends as the President, the Justice-Clerk, and myself on any arrangement you propose to us.<sup>2</sup>

To a candidate for the Principalship of St. Andrews, Dundas instructed his secretary to write that 'there are so few things to give they must be distributed according to local claims and recommendation as impartially as possible'.<sup>3</sup> Even more striking is the note that he wrote on Lord Polkemmet's application for a judgeship: 'I have every disposition to oblige Lord Polkemmet's family, but judges' gowns cannot be disposed of as matters of friendship and solicitation.'<sup>4</sup>

In regard to Indian appointments, Dundas was even more impartial. Though perfectly aware that corruption existed, and probably would continue to exist in India, in spite of determined efforts to combat it from home, he nevertheless made an earnest, unrelenting attack upon what he termed the 'jobs' of the Court of Directors. As we have already observed, his appointments of men to the leading posts in India were never guided by petty, unworthy, partisan motives. If he had been that sort of an administrator, the conceited guardian of the child Duke of Newcastle with his seven seats in Parliament would have received a more gracious reply to his request for the disposal of the

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 713, Edwards, comment in D.'s own hand on a document re the case of Capt. Milliken Craig. See also Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS., i. 494, D. to Pitt, Aug. 21, 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 748, N.L.S., R. D. to R. S. D., Dec. 7, 1810.

<sup>3</sup> Mel. MSS., lot 729, N.L.S., Instructions for reply to Rev. Dr. Adamson, June 18, 1799.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Instructions for reply dated Jan. 16, 1799.

Governor-Generalship. Indeed, we have yet to see a letter of Dundas's insisting upon the appointment of a person to India solely on the ground of family relationship or political expediency. In his instructions to the Indian governors, it is more usual to find such a sentence as: 'I wish to leave you to the full exercise of your judgment as to the attention you may pay to the persons I have to recommend; but, should I at any time be induced to point out any particular situation, I certainly mean that the local knowledge you have should determine the propriety of your complying with any such request.'<sup>1</sup> Very frequently Dundas wrote: 'I leave all to your unbiassed judgment',<sup>2</sup> or, 'I court information from every quarter and those who give it to me may rely that it will always be used with delicacy, and only in the promotion of the General Good.'<sup>3</sup> One of the best instances of his disinterestedness in an Indian appointment is his refusal to make Sir James Craig, one of his own countrymen, Commander-in-Chief on account of Craig's ungovernable temper.<sup>4</sup>

Of Dundas's personal courage, honour, and integrity, there is no question. Horace Walpole called him the 'boldest of men' because he never quailed before an opponent. To Dundas the threats of fanatical Jacobins, though far more serious, meant as little as those of disgruntled office-holders or members of Parliament. Whenever he rose to speak in the House, the resolution in his bearing compelled the attention of an assembly which ordinarily paid scant heed to orators who were as deficient as he in literary excellence and polish. In prosperity and adversity he always showed to the world the same calm, unruffled exterior. Even the impeachment, though it crushed him physically, could not break his spirit. Firm in his determina-

<sup>1</sup> Mel. MSS., Eskbank 'Grange', D. to Sir Robt. Abercromby, Dec. 20, 1794 (copy).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* D. to Sir Alured Clarke, Aug. 13, 1798 (copy).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* D. to Thos. Graham, Dec. 20, 1794 (copy), and other letters in the same collection.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* MSS. of précis of dispatches to Lord Mornington, D. to Mornington, Sept. 4, 1800. Craig later made an unenviable record as Governor in Canada.

tion to pursue the even tenor of his way, 'looking neither to the right nor to the left', he gave a dinner at the Admiralty on the day after the resolutions had been passed against him in the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> Of his indifference to money and pleasure for their own sakes, there is great unanimity of opinion among his contemporaries. Caring only for enough property to enable him to live up to the standard which custom demanded of a man in his position, he was thoughtless and generous to a fault about money matters. Had he been the type of person who thought only of 'feathering his nest', he would not have left to his only son the encumbrance of a heavy load of debts. When we think of the irregularities which he allowed in the Navy Office and the jobbery which he may have overlooked in other government offices, we must reflect that it is a very modern standard which forbids a public official from making money by manipulating the funds entrusted to him. Convinced that he had not himself defrauded the public for his own private profit, and never a stickler for forms, Dundas seems not to have regarded the transference of public money from one account to another at a time of great emergency, or even the speculation with it upon a small scale, as morally reprehensible according to the political code of his time. Although such carelessness as his, even in the busiest of Cabinet ministers, cannot be passed over lightly, we should always remember that he has yet to be proved guilty of wilfully defrauding the public for his own private advantage. Of his fairness and honour as an individual, no one was better qualified to judge than Lord Cornwallis, who was in close association with him for many years, and whose reputation for personal probity and incorruptibility was of the best. In a letter to his brother, the admiral, Cornwallis gave an enduring testimony to Dundas's real worth when he wrote:

It afforded me great satisfaction to learn that you had so

<sup>1</sup> Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 115. Auckland, Lord, Corr., iv. 232.



pleasant an interview with Lord Melville. I acted for several years under the direction of the Board at which he presided, and I can truly say that I never met with a more fair or honourable man.<sup>1</sup>

For a man without genius or intellectual gifts of the highest order, Dundas's achievements were very extraordinary. If they do not entitle him to stand among the giants of the age such as the two Pitts or Adam Smith, they should assure him a sizable niche in any eighteenth-century Hall of Fame. Unquestionably, the greatest of them is the political management of Scotland. With infinite patience, consummate tact, and unremitting labour, he built up an influence there which has never had its equal. Even in his busiest years in the Cabinet, this work never ceased. Without constant attention the Dundas 'interest' would have rapidly evaporated, built as it was on a foundation of political compromises, each essential to the stability of the edifice. The slowness with which decay set in when the bonds began to snap at the end of the century is a tribute to the excellence of the work. As late as 1811, Dundas possessed a considerable following in Scotland which was independent of party and might possibly have won back its former position of supremacy, had his successors possessed his skill. No sway of a political despot was ever so gentle and yet so firm. He had, in fact, very rare gifts which enabled him to exercise unquestioned dominance without giving great offence to his political opponents. One of the most delightful anecdotes of his meeting with a political opponent is that of his last encounter with Wilberforce. In recounting the incident after Dundas's death, Wilberforce wrote:

. . . We did not meet for a long time, and all his [Dundas's] connections most violently abused me. About a year before he died, we met in the stone passage which leads from the Horse Guards to the Treasury. We came suddenly upon

<sup>1</sup> Cornwallis-West, G., *Life and Letters of Admiral Cornwallis*, p. 427, Marquess C. to Admiral C., Aug. 12, 1804.

each other, just in the open part where the light struck upon our faces. We saw one another, and at first I thought he was passing on, but he stopped and called out, 'Ah, Wilberforce, how do you do?' and gave me a hearty shake by the hand. I would have given a thousand pounds for that shake. I never saw him afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

Though cursed as a tyrant by the radical agitators in the growing industrial cities, Dundas was never viciously hated by the Scottish Whigs. In after years, Lord Cockburn wrote of him as 'respected by the reasonable of his opponents, who, though doomed to suffer by his power, liked the individual, against whom they had nothing to say except that he was not on their side and reserved his patronage for his supporters.'<sup>2</sup>

At the India Board, where success likewise depended upon these qualities for the tactful handling of men, Dundas secured results which he would have thought worthy to set beside his victories in Scotland. In our eyes, which cannot view the Scottish political system as deserving of praise, they seem far worthier. It is hoped that the preceding pages have at least proved mistaken the opinion of Dundas expressed by James Mill in his *History of British India*. In that work, which has been called 'a solemn slander in several volumes upon British rule in India',<sup>3</sup> Mill wrote:

. . . The mind of Mr. Dundas was active and meddling. He was careful to exhibit the appearance of a great share in the Government of India; but what was it as President of the Board of Control that he ever did? He presented, as any body might have presented, the Company's annual budget, and he engrossed an extraordinary share of their patronage. But I know not any advice that he ever gave for the Government of India that was not either very obvious or wrong.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing could give a more misleading impression of the real state of the case. In the reorganization of the Government of India under fuller Crown control,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 132; Cockburn, *Life of Jeffrey*, i. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Mill, James, *History of British India*, iv. 491.

Dundas played a most prominent part. He appointed able governors and commanders-in-chief, conciliated their differences, and, in general, gave them *carte blanche* to act as they saw fit under the conditions that obtained on the spot. In ordinary circumstances, he preferred to appoint military men who had had no previous connexion with the subordinate officials over whom they were to exercise authority. The share of patronage which he engrossed, though large, was by no means so great as his enemies thought it to be. In regard to minor appointments, he was restricted on every side by the rigid rules laid down by the Court of Directors. His knowledge of India was by no means confined to the financial details of budget-making. He gathered information from every quarter about finance, about land tenure, about native customs, and about the native powers. He and Pitt would seek solitude at Walmer for days at a time to pore over the masses of papers that had accumulated on such a vexed subject as the Nawab of Arcot's affairs. If one may judge from the extent and variety of his Indian correspondence, Dundas knew India as well as any one who had never been there could be expected to know it. Lord Brougham, certainly no ardent admirer of Dundas, wrote of his reports on Indian affairs:

. . . Although they may not stand a comparison with some of Mr. Burke's in the profundity and enlargement of general views, any more than their style can be compared with his, they are nevertheless performances of the greatest merit, and repositories of information upon that vast subject, unrivalled for clearness and extent.<sup>1</sup>

In Indian affairs, Dundas therefore seems to have shown best that marvellous command of detail which later prompted Lord Castlereagh to speak of him as having enjoyed 'a faculty for the performance of public business greater perhaps than that possessed by any

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Lovat-Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 136, from Brougham's *Statesmen of the Time of George III.*

other individual in the world'.<sup>1</sup> In all matters of Indian administration, entirely familiar to him, Dundas revealed that sureness of touch which was characteristic of his management of Scottish politics. Vacillation and uncertainty only appeared when he indulged in speculation about matters which would of necessity be decided in India. Some of the suggestions which he threw out in his letters to Governors-General, such, for example, as that for a central army at Seringapatam, were quite impracticable. On this account, it was fortunate that he never forgot that he was too far away from the scene of action to decide such things himself. His talents lay in the managing of men, not in the direction of high policy. He was more the conciliator and the compromiser than the executive.

In an administrator of India, six months away by sea, a land where the men on the spot could be given *carte blanche* to do as they saw fit in emergencies, deficiencies in executive ability were not fraught with serious consequences. In fact, they might often be more an asset than a liability, for what was more often wanted at the India Board was an overseer, not a governor. At the War Office, on the other hand, deficiencies in executive ability were bound to make themselves felt. As a war minister, Dundas did not fully realize that his method of 'thinking aloud on every subject', which worked well enough with Indian officials, was certain to exasperate and confuse admirals and generals who were accustomed to obeying definite, concise orders. On far too many occasions, he wrote to the military and naval officers in the same strain that he wrote to the Governor-General of India, an official who was expected to use his own judgement and to assume immediate responsibility for his acts. It is very probable that a large number of the 'contradictory orders' and much of the unwise interference which so vexed the commanders in the field may thus

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wood's MSS. 'Life', Eskbank 'Grange', from Castlereagh's speech of Apr. 3, 1816.

be explained. In the management of the war, Dundas's personal courage and his facility in dealing with all kinds and conditions of men could not make up for his absolute lack of military knowledge, his deficiencies in executive ability, and his penchant for keeping too many irons in the fire; yet, for all that, he did his best. For ten years he struggled night and day in Parliament and at the Home and War Office with problems which would have tried the mettle of the ablest of statesmen. Severe criticism cannot be passed upon a minister of Dundas's admitted abilities who works himself to the point of sleeplessness and impaired health in the service of his country. His successes in Scotland and India, and even the few that he won at the Home Office, where personal courage was more important than keenness of intellect, more than made up for his shortcomings as director of military operations.

Dundas himself would have been the first to admit that he had not attained to greatness such as Pitt's, but he would also have said that greatness by itself can effect nothing in the world of politics. Without the co-operation and loyalty of large numbers of men with commonplace minds and commonplace ideals, the great statesman is powerless. It was Dundas who linked Pitt to the commonplace mind. If he had not been there to manage elections and patronage, it is hard to see how the British Government could have functioned smoothly during twenty very eventful years. When, in 1811, he looked back upon his long association with Pitt, the thought of past accomplishments filled him with an inward satisfaction, and he said to his old schoolfellow, George Buchan-Hepburn, in one of their last conversations together: 'George, nothing from without can disturb me now, when all is peace within.'<sup>1</sup> Although a character and achievements such as his do not entitle a man to be called great, they do oblige posterity to say of him that he deserved well of his country. With all his faults, Henry Dundas yet deserves to have his

<sup>1</sup> Wood, J. P., MSS. 'Life', Eskbank 'Grange'.

name, where he hoped to see it, on 'the list of those who have strenuously and not ineffectually exerted, during a long life of public service, their unremitting endeavours to promote the welfare, and the dearest and most essential interests of their country'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Dundas's speech of June 11, 1805, *supra*, p. 158.

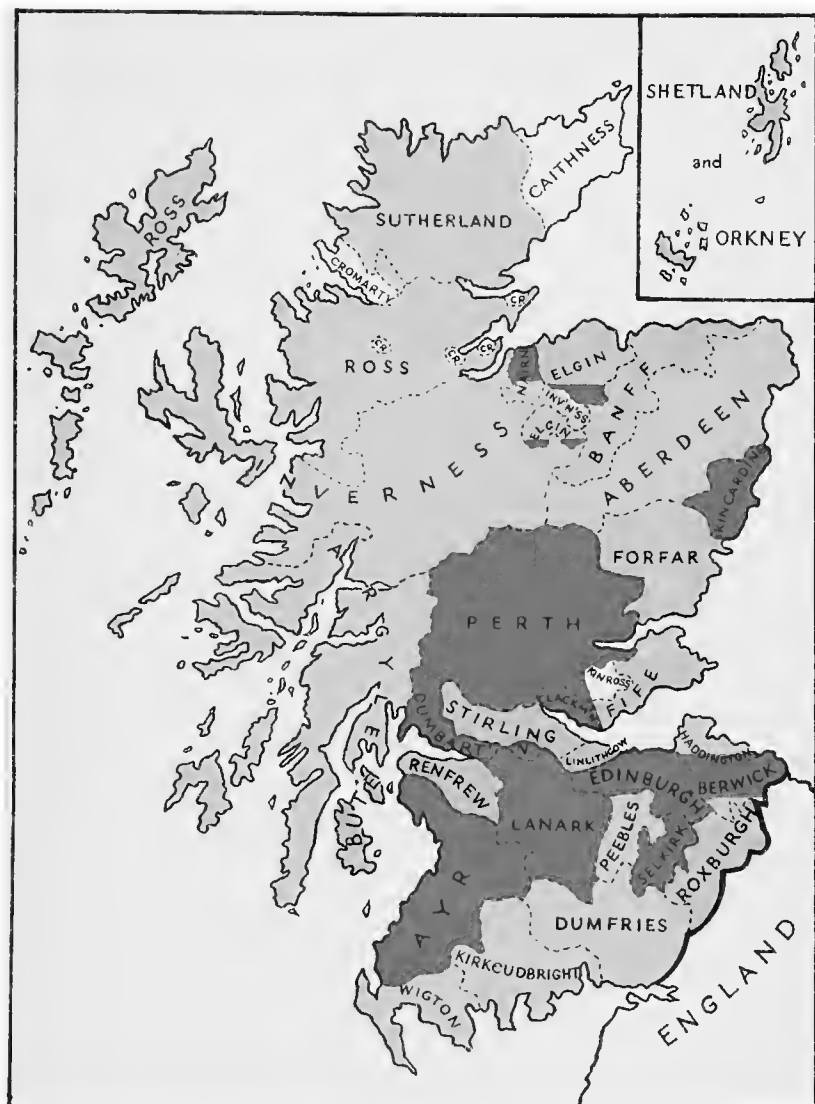
## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### MAPS ILLUSTRATING THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF THE DUNDAS 'INTEREST' IN SCOTLAND, 1774-1811

THE following maps are intended to show how Dundas's control over Scotland's forty-five representatives in the House of Commons waxed and waned. The data on which they are based is all derived from the sources mentioned on page 189, and especially from the masses of miscellaneous letters from Dundas's Scottish correspondents which are now in the National Library at Edinburgh. The maps therefore serve to illustrate the political changes described in Part II. Changes which took place during the course of a Parliament as a result of by-elections or of one of Dundas's political alliances are indicated by changing colours. For example, on the county map for the Parliament of 1790-6, a small bit of the lower portion of Kirkcudbright is coloured red because Dundas's candidate, Patrick Heron, won the seat at a by-election in March, 1795. Similarly, on the preceding county map, Elgin is coloured blue at the top and red at the bottom because Dundas in 1787 consummated his alliance with the Earl of Fife, then the member for that county. The maps make no pretence of being absolutely accurate in every detail. When there is not sufficient evidence on which to base a reasonably sound judgement, the county or burgh district in question is coloured yellow.





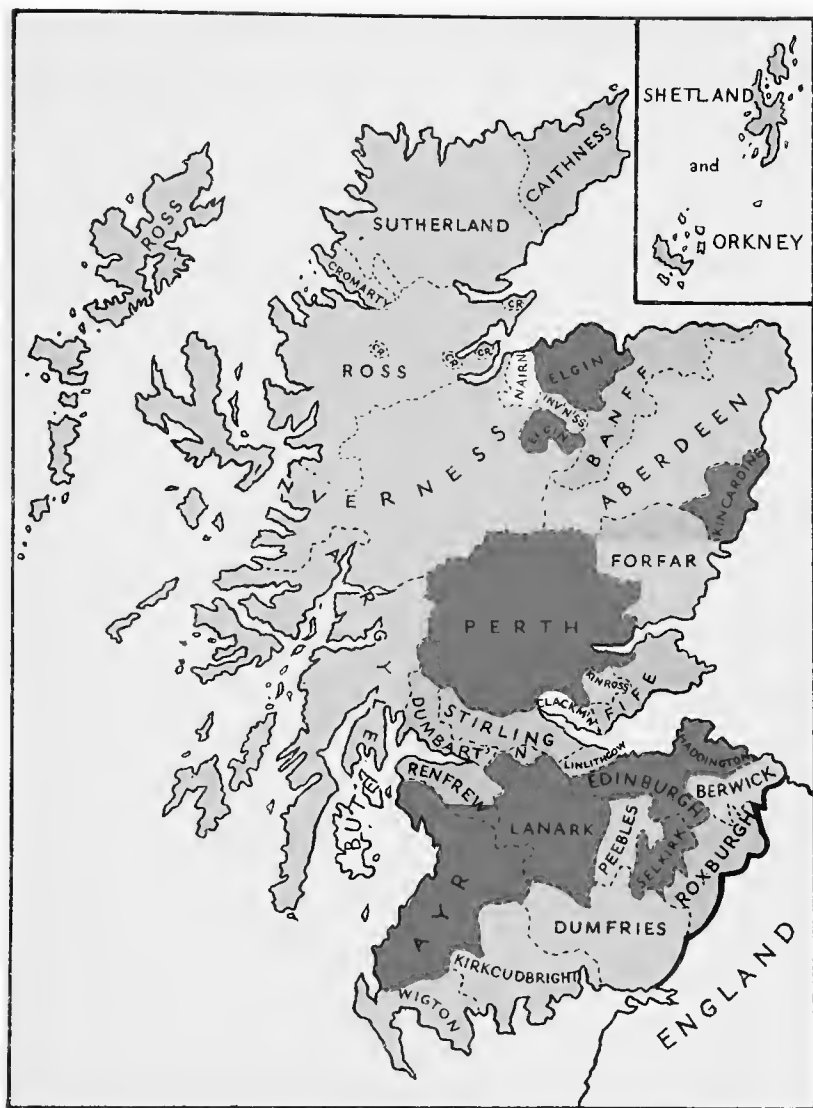
PARLIAMENT OF 1774-80  
(elected Oct. 1774, dissolved Sept. 1780)

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.





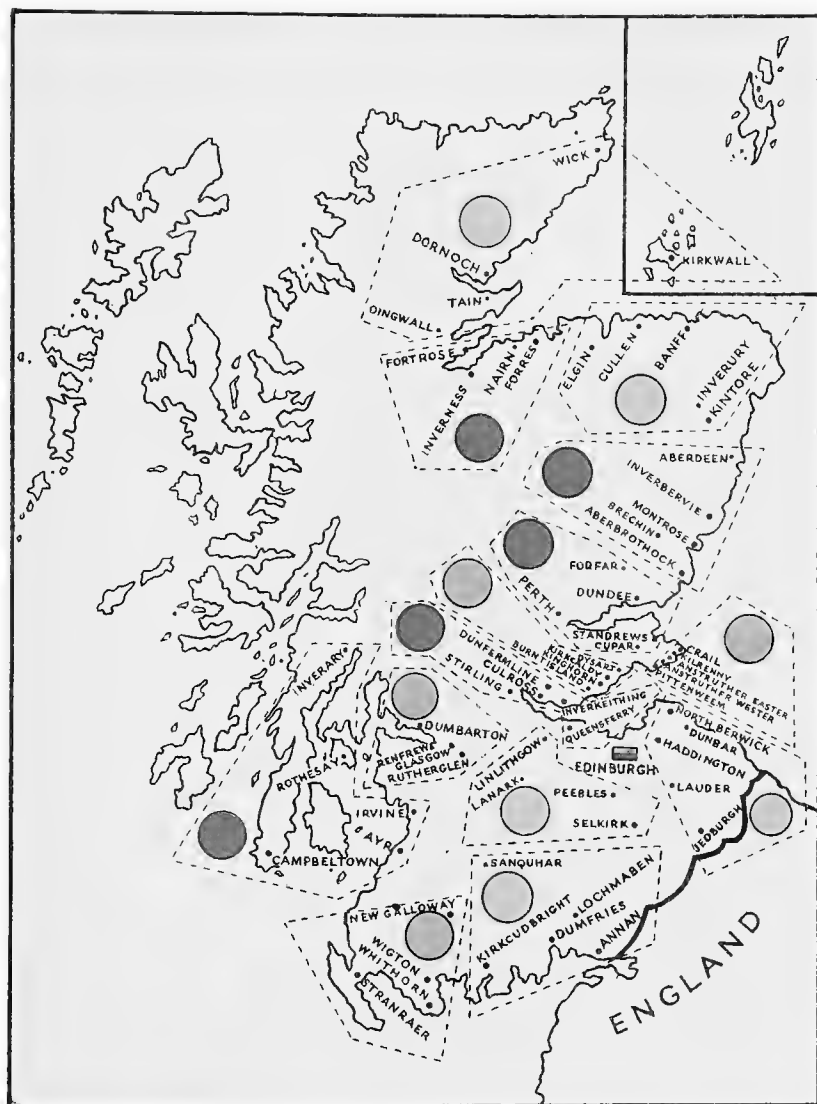




PARLIAMENT OF 1780-4  
*(elected Oct. 1780, dissolved Mar. 1784)*

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.



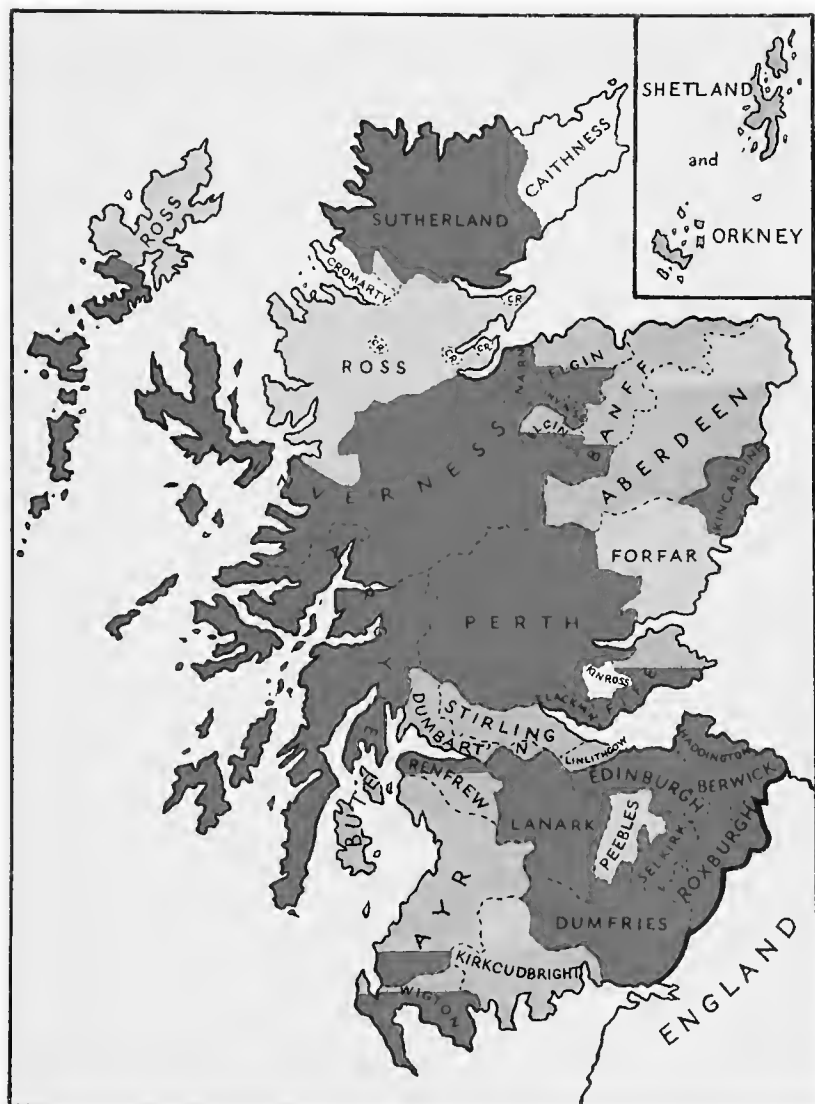


PARLIAMENT OF 1780-4  
(elected Oct. 1780, dissolved Mar. 1784)

BURGHs: Red, Friendly to Dundas; Blue, Unfriendly to Dundas; Yellow, Doubtful; Combined, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.







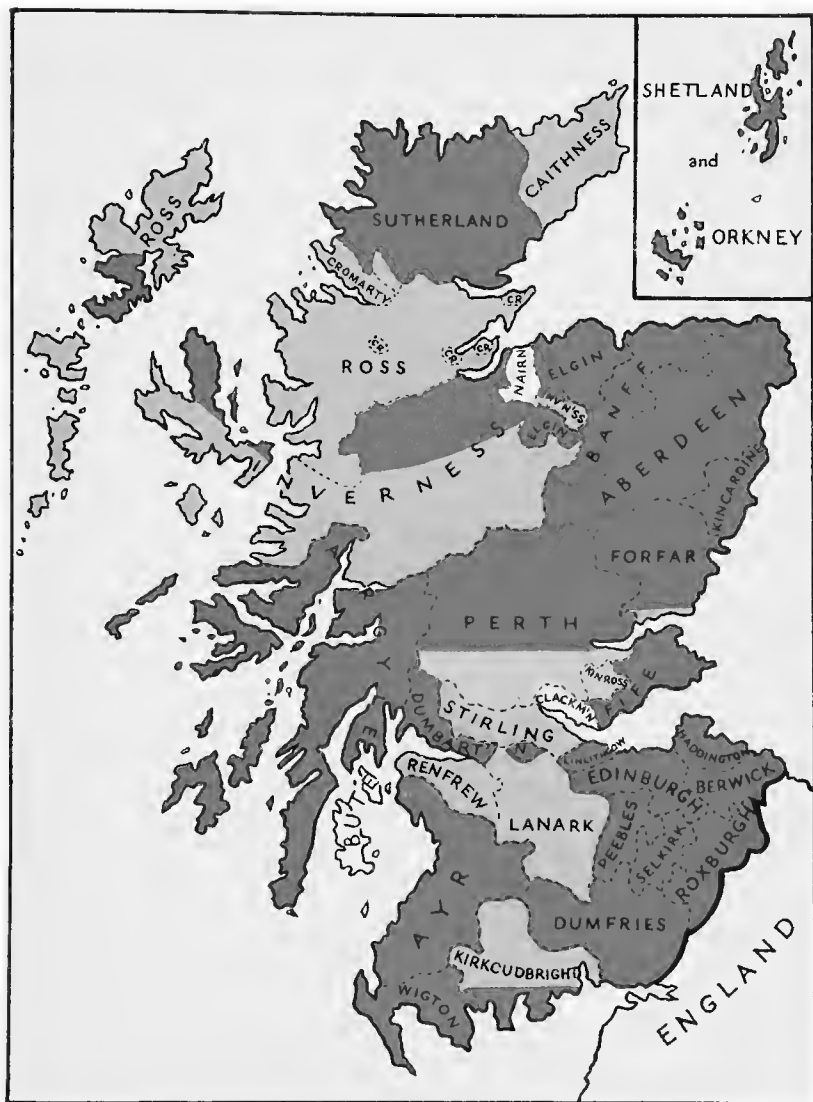
PARLIAMENT OF 1784-90  
(elected Apr. 1784, dissolved June 1790)

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.





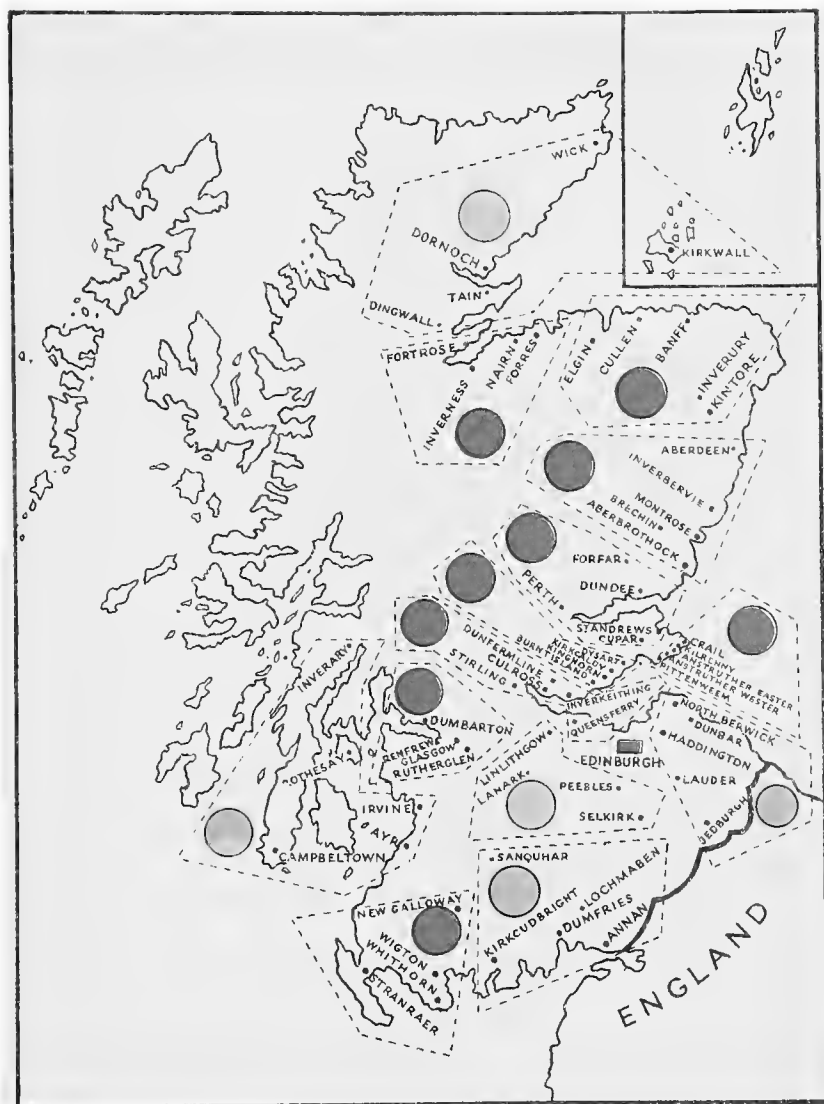




PARLIAMENT OF 1790-6  
(elected July 1790, dissolved May 1796)

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.



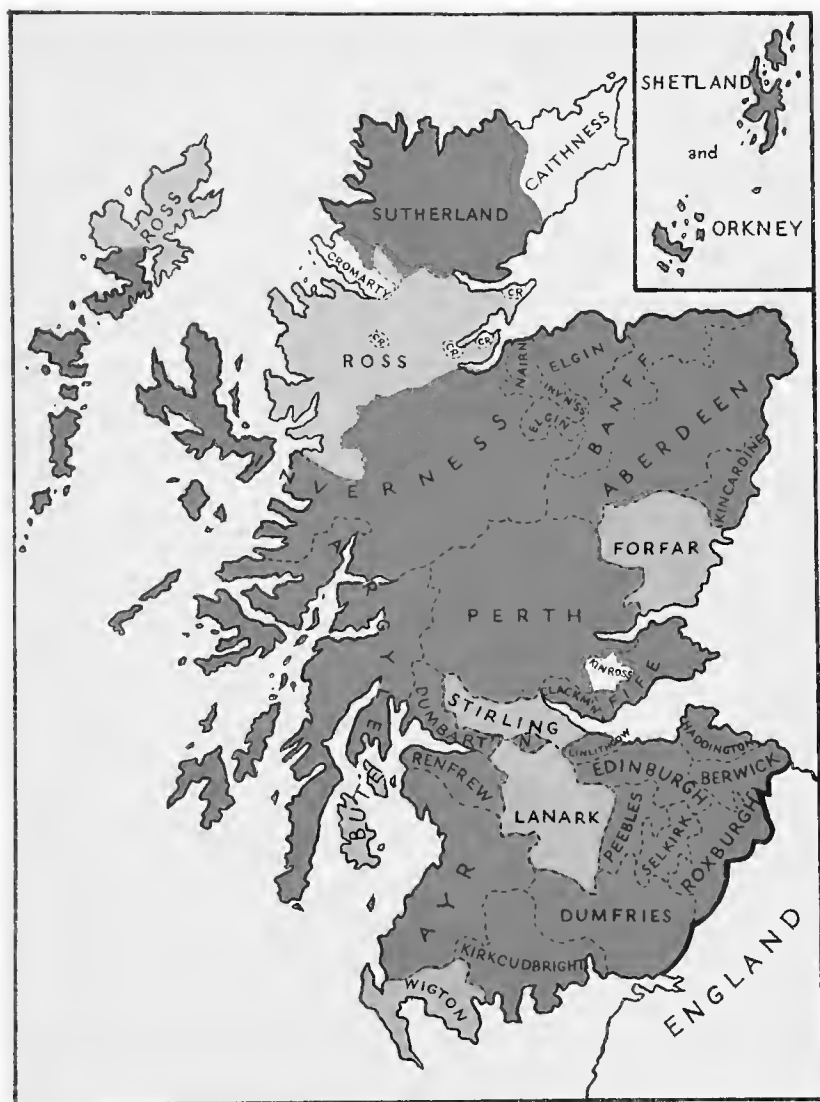


PARLIAMENT OF 1790-6  
(elected July 1790, dissolved May 1796)

BURGHs: *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.



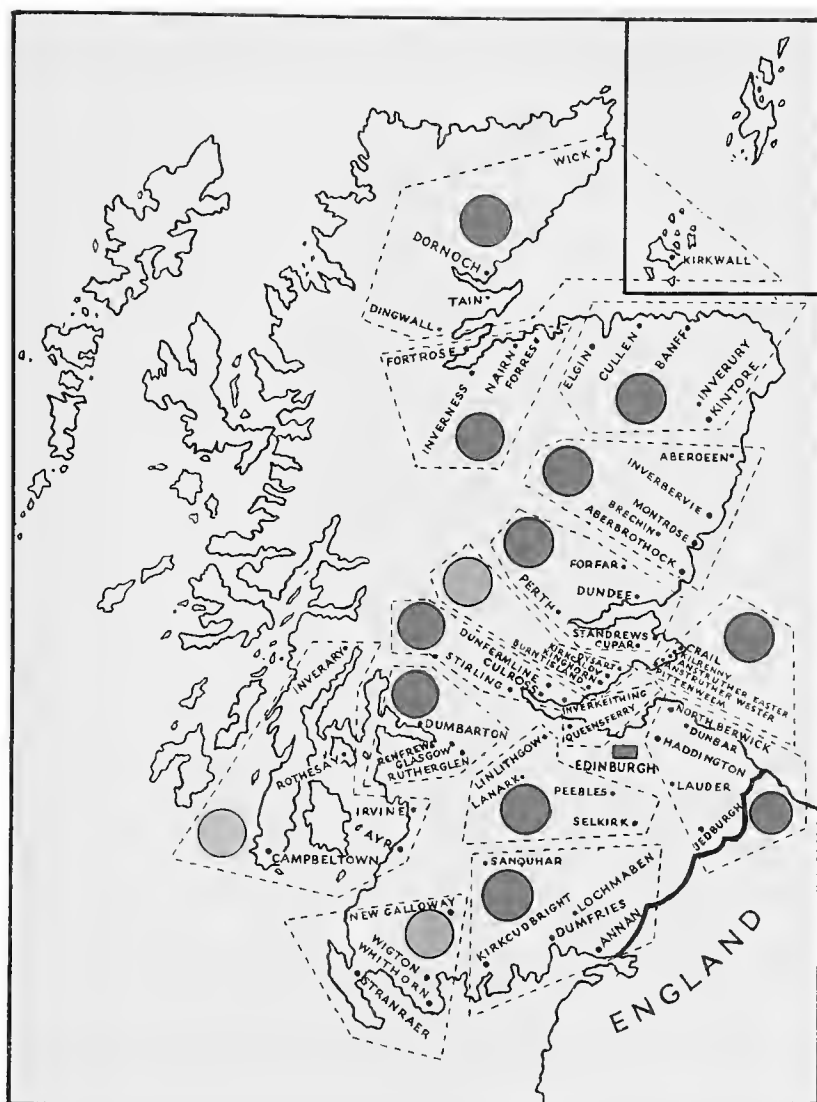




PARLIAMENT OF 1796-1802  
*(elected June 1796, dissolved June 1802)*

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful.

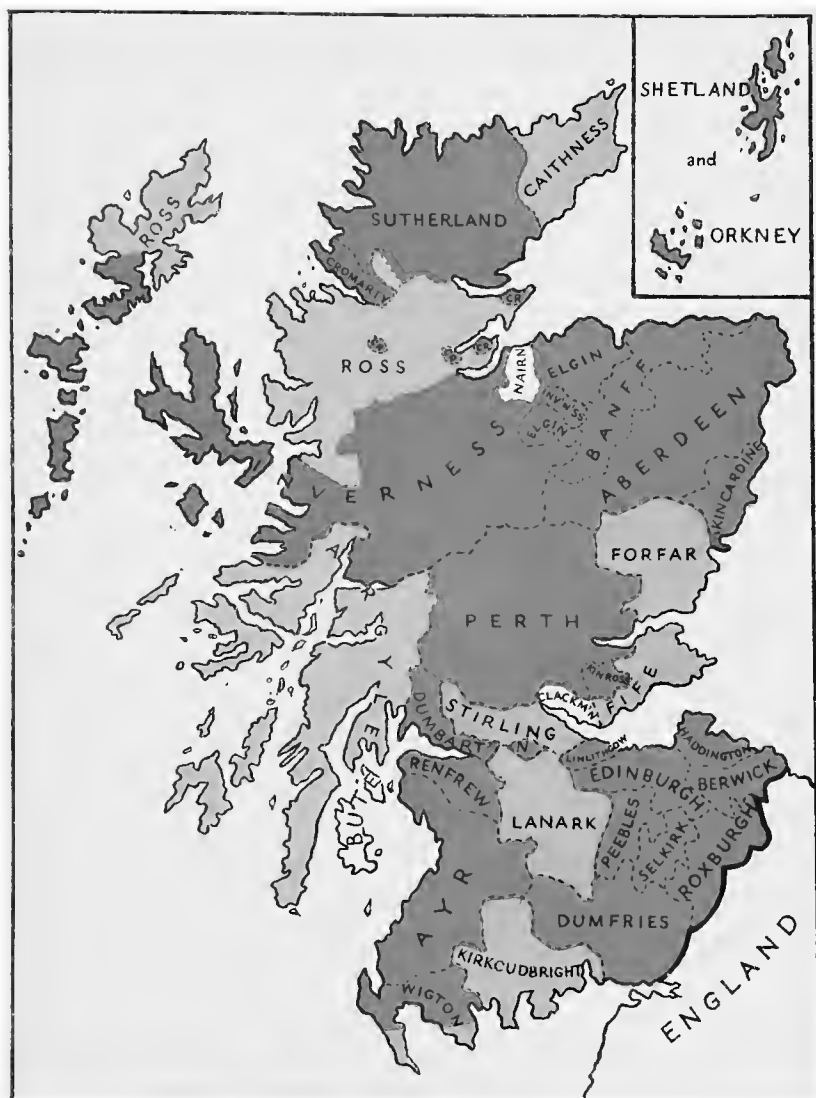




PARLIAMENT OF 1796-1802  
*(elected June 1796, dissolved June 1802)*

BURGHs: *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful.

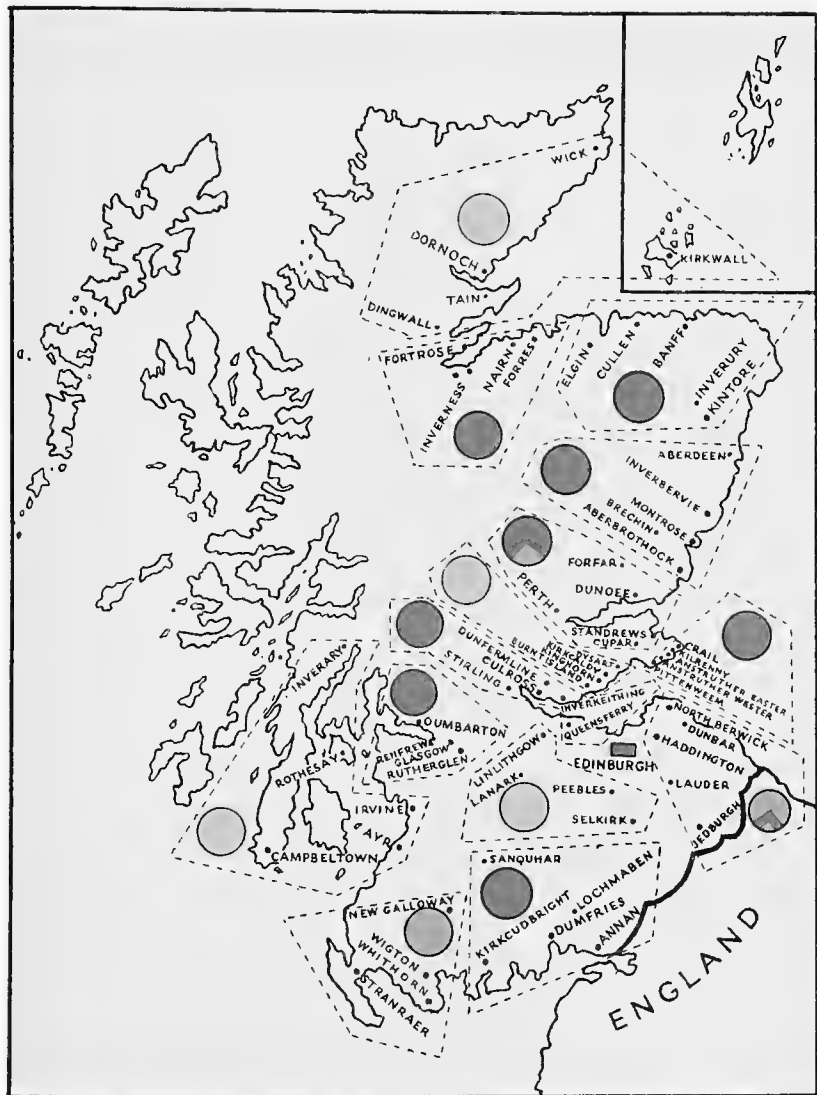




PARLIAMENT OF 1802-6  
*(elected July 1802, dissolved Oct. 1806)*

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.



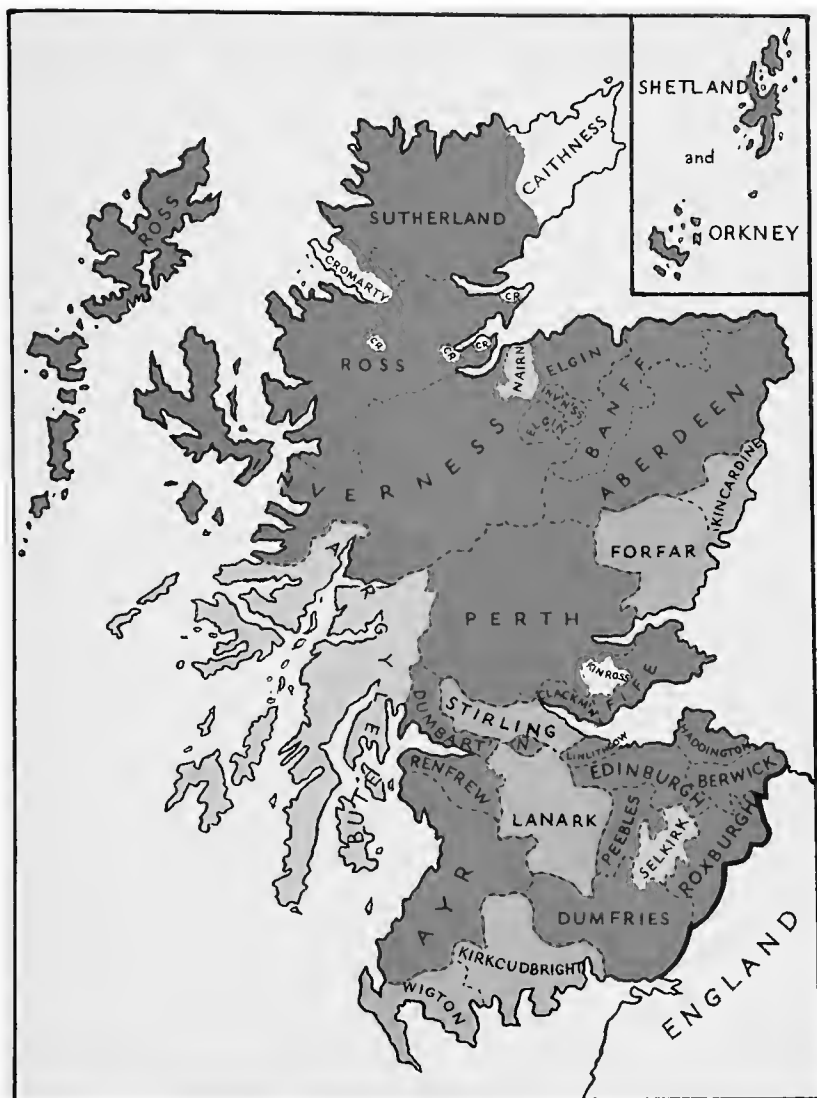


PARLIAMENT OF 1802-6  
*(elected July 1802, dissolved Oct. 1806)*

BURGHs: *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.







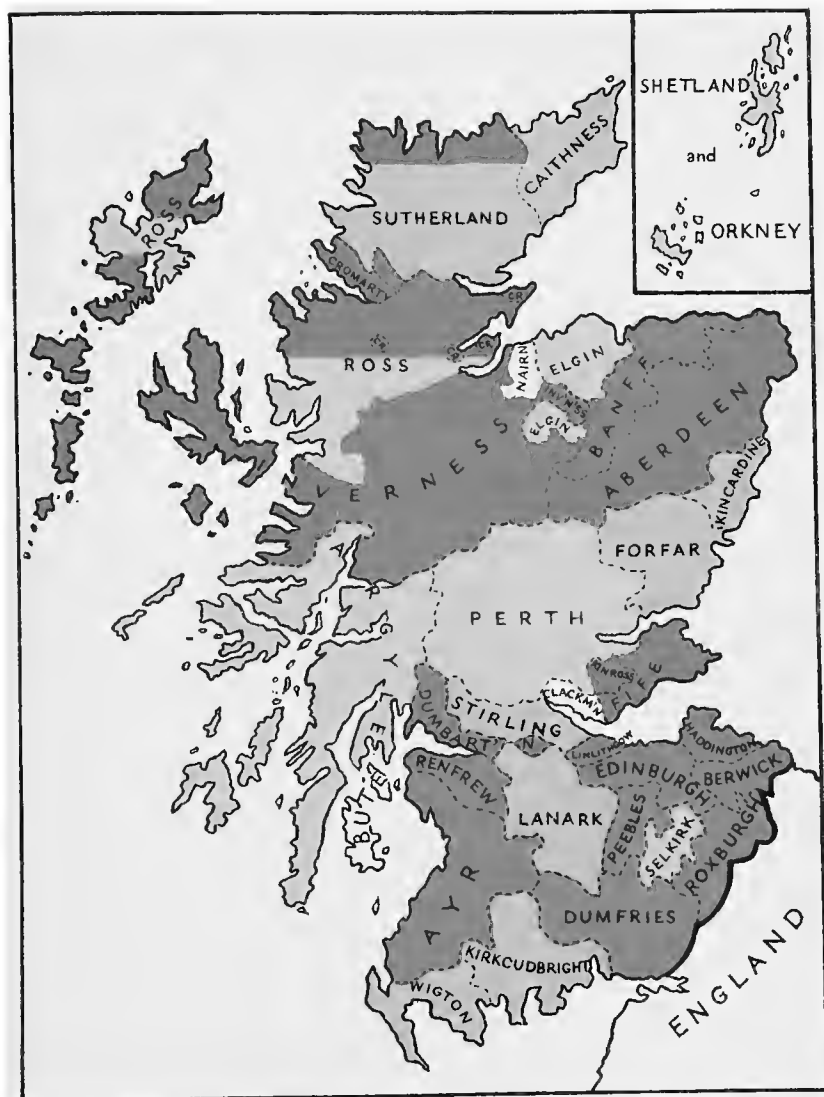
PARLIAMENT OF 1806-7  
*(elected Nov. 1806, dissolved Apr. 1807)*

COUNTIES: *White*, Unrepresented; *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful.







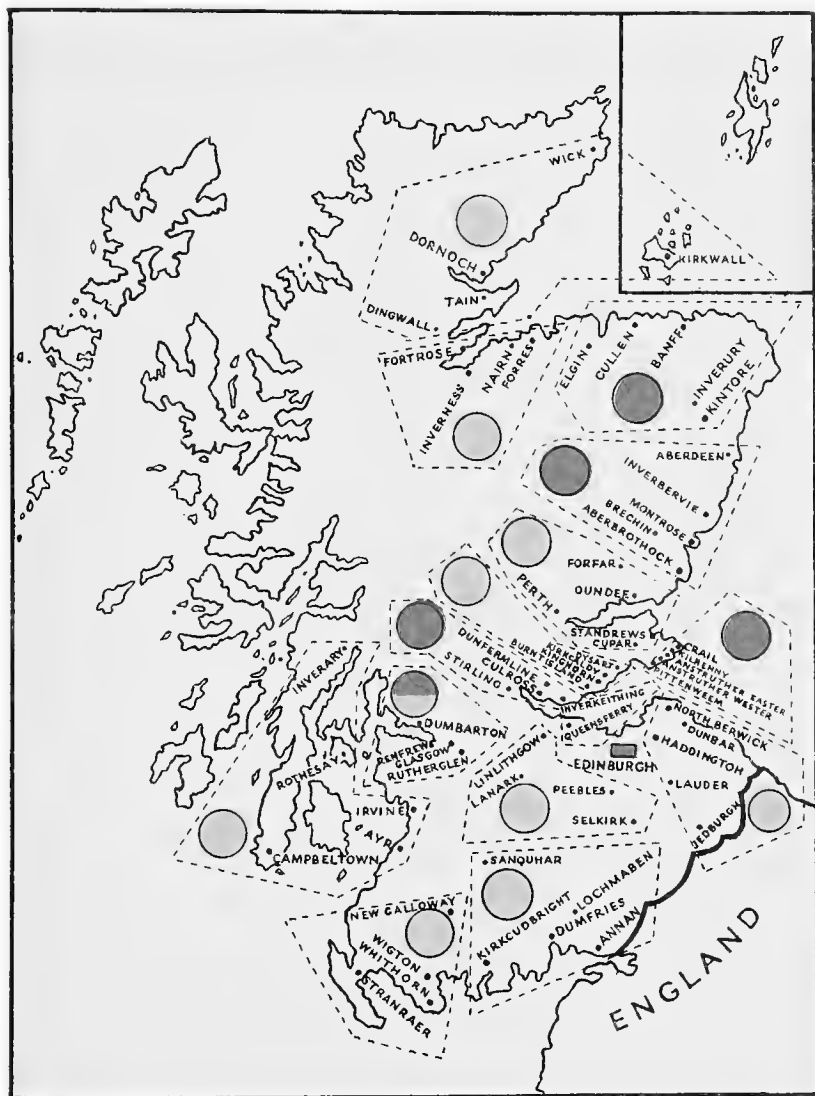


## PARLIAMENT OF 1807-12

(elected May 1807. Political Situation until Dundas's Death, May 1811)

COUNTIES: White, Unrepresented; Red, Friendly to Dundas; Blue, Unfriendly to Dundas; Yellow, Doubtful; Combined, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.





## PARLIAMENT OF 1807-12

*(elected May 1807. Political Situation until Dundas's Death, May 1811)*

**BURGHES:** *Red*, Friendly to Dundas; *Blue*, Unfriendly to Dundas; *Yellow*, Doubtful; *Combined*, Shows varying conditions chronologically beginning at the top.





# RECAPITULATION

<i>Parliament of</i>	<i>Dundas 'Interest' at beginning.</i>		<i>Dundas 'Interest' at end.</i>		<i>Totals.</i>	
	<i>Counties.</i>	<i>Burghs.</i>	<i>Counties.</i>	<i>Burghs.</i>	<i>Beg.</i>	<i>End.</i>
1774-80	10	2	10	2	12	12
1780-4	8	5	9	6	13	15
1784-90	15	7	19	8	22	27
1790-6	22	10	20	10	32	30
1796-1802	24	12	24	12	36	36
1802-6	22	9	21	8	31	29
1806-7	20	5	20	5	25	25
1807-12	18	6	16	5	24	21



## APPENDIX B

### SELECTIONS FROM THE BURKE-DUNDAS LETTERS NOW IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

1. Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas, dated Charles Street, March 1, 1783. (Original, but not signed.)

Dear Sir:

Agreeably to your desire, I send you the treaties of 1782 and 1775. The first is at p. 77 mark x and the second at p. 154. The articles begin at Par. 6. I think it would be necessary to add that the King of Tanjore should be effectually secured against the wicked attempts which have been made to divert the water which purifies the country, and that he should be put again into possession of his records; as well as that some course should be taken against the forcing of residents against his will upon him, as well as the perpetual Change [Charge] of military commanders. These are the two principal sources of the distress of the country. As to the district Mr. Rumbold had from him we have evidence before us that since it has come into English hands it has yielded absolutely nothing to the Company. In his, it was worth £30,000 a year. It is just so much taken from his ability to comply with our other demands without any sort of advantage, much like our other robberies. Whilst we left Benares in native hands, our payments were as regular as the Bank's. Since it is come into our own management, the first thing we hear of is a rise of revenue, then a *remission* and notice of a *new* remission. Native Government can alone combine the prosperity of the country with the regularity of payments and this is not only true of Tanjore and Benares, but of every other mediate or immediate dependency in India. I should be glad to talk to you of a systematic and in my opinion easy plan on that subject.

I am with real regard and esteem

My dear sir,

Your most faithful

Obedient humble servant,

2. Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas, dated April 1, 1787. (Original.)

Sir:

I shall say very little of my feelings with regard to the change of opinions which your letter announces. I look on it as a full adoption of the plan supposed to be Mr. Grenville's. I shall not prognosticate the total loss of our object from it for I am resolved to indulge some hope to animate me in this difficult pursuit to the last moment. But you and Mr. Pitt cannot fail to recollect that you were yourselves the first to animate, and indeed to urge me to expedition and to place in a very strong light before me the consequences of any delay. I then little thought of this proposition. Perhaps wisely, as from delay we should not suffer much, but from an appearance of indecision, and a doubt of the validity of the ground on which we gave our votes in the committee, we all suffer much in reputation. The hopes of those who oppose us will be raised and scope given to their cabals which how powerful they are I have no need to inform you. I can say nothing with regard to the choice we shall make because I have not yet seen Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan. Of one thing you may be assured that no considerations whatsoever, short of a strong conviction of the danger of our losing the impeachment shall ever induce me to differ as to the mode of proceeding with any gentleman whose appearance in favour of a publick cause must give us strength and credit. I have no more doubt of Mr. Pitt's and your sincerity so far as you go with us than I have of my own. But I must trouble for the effect of consultation with those who by every indication are adverse to all the substantial parts of the proceeding. I cannot admit that the charges are improperly drawn. I am sure they could have no effect if they were drawn otherwise. The matter is better specified than is common in the charge delivered. I do not know that any precedent exists in which upon a report from a committee appointed to take matters of charge into consideration another committee has been ordered to draw up articles before the House came to a resolution to impeach. I am pretty sure that there are no such precedents or any like them. Excuse this trouble. I am full of uneasiness and anxiety. I can conceive difficulties on your side but I know that they will be hourly increased by

not meeting them early. You will infallibly find it so. I am with very great respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,  
Edm[und] Burke.

3. Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas, dated Gerard Street, April 14, 1787. (Original.)

Sir:

Almost all the charges are finished, so far as stretching can be called finishing, and as our Council are not yet come to town, I rather think it better that they should be communicated to you and Mr. Pitt in their present state than to leave you at a loss for the general outline for too long a time. They are at present in several hands that is to say, in the hands of several movers for revision. I am in hopes to collect some for you to-morrow. Mr. Sheridan has the Begums but I fear he is out of town. Whatever can be collected shall be sent without delay. Surely strong grounds ought to be laid for a commission when the criminal himself has called for speedy trial, when all his recorded proceedings are here, and when, except Palmer, all his confidential agents are in England and when knowing the charges last year, he might if he pleased, when the Bill for Continuance was brought forward [have] moved at the same time provisally that a commission might go out. I should think that a stronger matter than mere affidavit ought to be had before the House of Lords for a delay that might be tantamount to a discharge of the proceedings. However this is an affair to be discussed at greater leisure.

I have the honour to be,

Your most obedient and humble servant,  
Edmund Burke.

## APPENDIX C

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## MANUSCRIPT

*Melville Manuscripts*

1. MSS. sold by Messrs. Sotheby and Company of 35 New Bond Street, London, by authority of Violet, Viscountess Melville on June 2, 1924, April 26, 1926, and February 23, 1927. These are designated by lot numbers attached to the bundles by Messrs. Sotheby and Company. Those purchased for the National Library of Scotland have now been bound and catalogued with great care by Dr. H. W. Meikle, but the original lot numbers are referred to in the new catalogue. The sale of the final portion of the Melville Papers took place at Sotheby's on July 22, 1929. Use has been made of the large mass of miscellaneous India correspondence then bought by Mr. Francis Edwards, and of a few items bought by the National Library of Scotland. In the National Library of Scotland.
- Lots 34, 36, 38, 39, 41-6 (1924). Burke Correspondence.
- Lots 167-97 (1924). Sir Walter Scott's correspondence with Henry Dundas (Lord Melville) and Robert Saunders Dundas (2nd Lord Melville) covering the years 1803-26.
- Lot 153 (1924). North Correspondence. Only one letter of Lord North (1781), and a few of Frederick North, Governor of Ceylon (1802).
- Lot 157 *et al.* (1924). Letter-book of Rear Admiral Sir Home Popham, c. 1801-4, and a few letters.
- Lot 164 (1924). George Rose Correspondence, c. 1800.
- Lots 32, 33 (1924). Two letters of James Boswell.
- Lot 103 (1926). Gordon Correspondence, chiefly letters of Alexander, 4th Duke of Gordon, and of Lord Adam Gordon.
- Lot 729 (1927). A large number of note-books in which Henry Dundas's secretaries summarized letters addressed to Dundas, together with Dundas's notations for reply, c. 1796-1801.
- Lot 731 (1927). Correspondence of Robert Dundas of Arniston, with his uncle, Henry Dundas.

- Lot 740 (1927). Correspondence *in re* Scottish Custom House charges. Two letters of Earl of Glencairn.
- Lot 741 (1927). Correspondence *in re* Edinburgh Excise office. R. Graham of Fintry, friend of Robert Burns.
- Lot 746 (1927). A large collection *in re* Scottish elections.
- Lot 748 (1927). Scottish legal papers, *c.* 1800.
- Lot 749 (1927). Old military force of Scotland 1780. Imports and exports from Scotland 1755-82. Trade of Ireland with America.
- Lot 750 (1927). Miscellaneous.  
In the possession of Mr. Francis Edwards, 83 High Street, London, W.1, in April 1927. (Some of these have been sold since that date.)
- Lot 55 (1924) *et al.* Cape of Good Hope, letters of A. Barnard, Nov. 1798 to Jan. 1800, and others.
- Lot 92 (1926). Cape of Good Hope, Miscellaneous.
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- Lot 692 (1927). West Indies, *c.* 1800. Miscellaneous.
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- Lot 695 (1927). Miscellaneous Correspondence, Bombay, Sir Robert Abercromby, Sir Wm. Medows, Andrew Ramsay, 1788-92.
- Lot 696 (1927). Correspondence of Jonathan Duncan, Governor of Bombay, 1795-1802.
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- Lot 702 (1927). East India Company, Miscellaneous.
- Lot 703 (1927). Letters of Lord Hobart, Lord Clive, Sir Wm. Jones, and others. India, 1790's.
- Lot 704 (1927). Correspondence of Sir John MacPherson, Governor-General. India, 1785-6.
- Lot 706 (1927). Correspondence of Lord Clive, Gov. of Madras, *c.* 1798, with many other Madras documents.
- Lot 708 (1927). Correspondence of Lord Hobart, Gov. of Madras, 1794-8.



- Lot 709 (1927). Miscellaneous letters. Gen. Wm. Medows, Sir Charles Oakeley, Gov. of Madras, 1790-4.
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- Lot 712 (1927). Correspondence of Sir John Shore (Lord Teignmouth), Gov.-Gen. of India, 1793-8.
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- Lot 720 (1927). Large collection of miscellaneous naval papers.
- Lot 723 (1927). Miscellaneous. Lord Mansfield, Sir Wm. Howe, Lord Auckland, Lord Eldon, Lord Mornington (Marquess Wellesley), and others.
- Lots 754 and 755 (1927). Miscellaneous correspondence *in re* the French Revolution and the affairs of Europe and the Near East.
- Lots 765 and 766 (1927). Persia. Correspondence of Gen. John Morrison, 1783-92, and of Sir John Malcolm, Envoy to Persia, 1799-1801.
- Lot 771 (1927). Miscellaneous. Slave Trade. City of London.
- In the possession of the writer:
- A large mass of miscellaneous letters and memoranda. (Bought of Mr. Bernard Halliday, Leicester.)
- A few letters and copies of letters. (Given by Mr. Edwards.)
- A volume of Madras Abstracts, and a miscellaneous mass of India and other correspondence. (Bought of Mr. Edwards.)
- MSS. 'Catalogue of Lord Melville's East India Correspondence', contains précis of most letters received from the East except those of Governors and Commanders-in-Chief. (Bought of Mr. Edwards.)
2. MSS. in the possession of Violet, Viscountess Melville.
- Several letters and financial memoranda, *c.* 1800.
- Family Album, typewritten from the originals by R. Dundas of Arniston, 1893.
- Several Letter-books of India Correspondence. (Kept at 'The Grange', Eskbank, Midlothian.)
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- Bound MSS. volume containing memoirs and sketches of the careers of several members of the Dundas family, by John Philip Wood, written *c.* 1821. (Kept at 'The Grange', Eskbank, Midlothian.)

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